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THE RULES

*Rev. J. Delaney*

OF

# A CHRISTIAN LIFE,

SELECTED

FROM THE MOST APPROVED SPIRITUAL WRITERS.

*In a Series of Letters to a Lady,*

CONVERTED FROM PROTESTANTISM TO THE CATHOLIC FAITH.

TRANSLATED FROM THE MS. OF THE REV. C. PREMORD,  
VICAR-GENERAL OF THE BISHOP OF STRASBURG, &c. &c. &c.

*Quæcumque dixi de tuo, Domine, agnoscant et tui. Si quæ de meo,  
et tu ignosce, et tui.—S. Austin.*

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1834.

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## P R E F A C E.

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DIVINE PROVIDENCE having been pleased to make use of the writer of these letters to contribute to the conversion of a Protestant lady to the Catholic faith; she earnestly begged of him to leave her in writing the rules of conduct which he had an occasion of giving her in the course of her instruction, he thought that he could not with propriety refuse to comply with her pious desires. To what he had told her by word of mouth, he considered that it might be useful to add observations and advice applicable to the circumstances in which he saw she would be placed either sooner or later. But distrusting with justice his limited abilities, he communicated his work to enlightened friends, upon whose judgment and impartiality he could safely rely. They approved it; and thinking that it might be serviceable to those whom Almighty God should inspire with a desire of returning to the bosom of the Catholic Church, they advised and encouraged him to have it published.

The author has not the silly and presumptuous pretension of offering to the pious Catholic new maxims



or rules of conduct and perfection. On the contrary, his intention is to say nothing of himself, and to hazard nothing upon his private opinion and judgment. In the decisions as well as in the advice which he gives, he constantly takes for his guides, the Holy Scriptures, the authors the most recommendable in the Church, by their learning, experience, and eminent virtues. He most generally translates their own words with a scrupulous exactness, from the fear of deviating in the least from their sentiments ; although, by thus keeping as close as possible to the originals, he may have used turns of phrases not quite conformable to the genius of the English tongue. His chief aim has been to make a whole of the various rules of conduct which are to be met with scattered in almost all the works and sermons on the duties of a Christian, and to compose from them a short treatise of practical morality, adapted to the situation and wants of a Protestant lady newly converted, and destined to live in the world. It is not, therefore, from an insignificant writer that the pious reader will receive instructions ; he will have no other teachers but Saints Chrysostome, Austin, Gregory the Great, and Francis of Sales ; Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Fenelon, Massillon, *The Imitation of Christ*, Rodriquez, &c. &c. All that which will be found useful and praiseworthy in this work, exclusively belongs to those learned and holy personages. The writer claims only as his own, the inelegance of the style, and the many other faults and imperfections with which the following pages unfortunately abound. May thy servants, O my God,

acknowledge, and be edified at all that comes from thee. Vouchsafe to forgive me, and may likewise thy servants forgive me, for what I may have said from myself. “*Quæcumque dixi de tuo agnoscant et tui; si quæ de meo, et tu ignosce et tui.*”—St. Austin, Lib. de Tren. c. ultimo. “The widow who offered two mites, did not prevent the magnificent presents of the rich. Nor did they who offered for the reestablishment of the temple, skins, wool, and goat’s hair, hinder those who could give gold, silver, or precious stones. I shall be happy if I can present hairs, and shall rejoice to see others add ornaments of purple and gold tissues.”—St. Gr. of Nys.

The texts of the Holy Scriptures quoted in this work are taken from the Catholic translation of the Bible, Doway Edition.



THE

RULES OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE.

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I.

MY LADY,

I HAVE the honour of sending to you in writing, as you have requested me, the instructions which have been the matter of our conversations on the duties of a Christian life. You will find nothing new in these pages. To the maxims and rules of conduct which I have laid before you, I have only added the reflections, which appeared to me to arise naturally from the subject, or which I had no occasion of sufficiently unfolding to you. I need not tell you that, were you to want advice, or meet with difficulties which you could not easily answer, you may write to me whenever you please, and without the least fear of being an unwelcome intruder upon my time. I shall be always disposed to give you all the explanations which you may want, and very happy if I can be instrumental to remove the doubts which may now and then perplex your mind. I entertain a confident hope that Almighty God, who has inspired you with such an earnest desire of being thoroughly instructed in his holy law, will not permit that I should lead you into error or illusion by too severe or too relaxed decisions, but that he will vouchsafe in his mercy to supply what is so greatly deficient in me, guide my pen by the light of the Holy

Ghost, and make you through the interior unction of his divine grace, relish the truths, the knowledge and practice of which are necessary to secure your eternal salvation.

It is a great comfort to me to learn that my hopes are fully realized ; that you continue to enjoy a peace of soul and a tranquillity of conscience heretofore unknown to you, and feel an interior satisfaction which far compensates the sacrifices you have made. It is the first reward of your fidelity to correspond with the impressions of the Holy Ghost, and one of the happy fruits of your return into the bosom of the true Church.

Yes, the more acquainted you are with our holy religion, the more delighted you will be for having embraced it. The more exact you are in fulfilling its duties, the more feelingly you will experience that the yoke of the Lord is sweet and his burden light. Instead of that indigested mass of vain superstitions, senseless practices, frivolous observances, of which our Protestant brethren compose the creed of the Catholic Church, you will every day acquire a fresh proof, that in the dogmas she professes to believe, as well as in the rules of conduct which she gives to her children, in her doctrine as well as in her precepts, in her worship as well as in her discipline and ceremonies, all is drawn from and grounded upon the Holy Scriptures, and conformable to the spirit of the purest antiquity. All that she ordains or authorizes commands the assent of enlightened reason, aggrandizes and exalts the soul, inspires with noble and sublime thoughts and generous actions, entertains, fortifies, improves the honest feelings which proceed from nature, and tends to make of all human kind one single family, animated with the same faith, walking under the same chief, governed by the same laws, supported by the same hopes, sighing after the same spiritual goods, and



daily offering to God the only homage worthy of him,—the homage of an humble and grateful heart, the adoration in spirit and truth.

Rejoice therefore to have been brought back to that sheepfold where you will henceforth live without solicitude, and rest with security under the protection of the Divine Shepherd. Rejoice to have now no other authority to listen to but to that of the Catholic Church, which alone is the Church of the living God; “the pillar and ground of the truth.” As long as you remain submissive to her infallible decisions, you will not be exposed to the danger of being led astray, “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”—Eph. iv. 14. Jesus Christ himself will instruct and guide you. This God Saviour has been pleased to assure us of it in the most positive manner when speaking to his apostles, and in their persons to all their lawful successors in the ministry of the Gospel, he told them: “Who heareth you, heareth me, and who despiseth you, despiseth me . . . Teach all nations . . . to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days to the consummation of the world . . . He who will not hear the Church let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican.”—Matt. xxviii. 20, xviii. 17.

Never forget what I have repeatedly told you, and of which you seemed fully convinced, that if it is the most precious advantage which you could enjoy in this life, and for which you should every day express the most lively gratitude to God, to be now a member of the Holy Catholic Church; that if it is most certain that it is impossible without faith to please God, it is equally unquestionable that “faith without works is dead.”—James ii. 26. That to enter into life we must keep the commandments, and to possess the kingdom of God it

is not enough to say "Lord, Lord, but that he only that does his will shall enter into it."—Matt. vii. 21. Now what must you consider as the will of God in your regard? This will, which you cannot deliberately violate or resist without inflicting a mortal wound on your soul, is that you should remain always faithful to your promises and sacred engagements, always pure, always holy, "labouring the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election."—2 Pet. i. 16. In a word, that the faith which ought constantly to be the rule of all your judgments, the main spring of all your actions, the soul of all your conduct, is a faith always animated with charity and guided by charity. It is thus, that living in the world, yet you "would not be in the world."—John xv. 19.

It is God who has established all the different conditions of life; "He loveth all things, and hateth none of the things he hath made."—Wisd. xi. 25. Celibacy and a religious state are holy, and matrimony is sanctified by Jesus Christ, who has elevated it to a spiritual and divine order, since, as the apostle says, it is the symbol of his union with his church. "Yes," says St. Austin, "all conditions are holy, it is only the abuse of them which is proscribed." David, Ezechias, Edward, Louis, exhibited upon a throne the example of the most splendid virtues. In the midst of all the allurements, dissipations, and temptations of a court, Clotilda, Elizabeth of Hungary and Portugal, preserved their innocence and were raised to the highest perfection. We find great saints among soldiers, as well as among solitaries and recluses; among the rich as well as among the poor. While there have been the most vicious characters in the strictest orders and most regular monasteries, and a reprobate even among the twelve apostles. This is an evident proof that it is not the condition we are in, which

will make us saints or reprobates, but the manner with which we shall perform its duties.

It is true that we are commanded not to love the world, nor "the things of the world."—1 John ii. 15. But the world which is thus reprobated by Jesus Christ is not that world which in its denomination includes all the different conditions of which civil societies are composed, in opposition to a religious state, nor what is generally called the high and busy world, in opposition to the humbler and poorer classes or orders of men. It is the world which is to be met every where, among the poor as well as among the rich, the unlearned as well as the learned, the low as well as the high, the laity as well as the clergy and religious. That world is a society of persons, whose maxims, sentiments, and conduct, whatever may be their condition, age, or sex, are contrary to the maxims, sentiments, and precepts of the Gospel, and whose actions are influenced by the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life."—1 John ii. 16. That is to say, who wish for nothing, labour for nothing, tend to nothing, but the acquisition either of honours, riches, or pleasures, and the gratification of their passions; in short, who careless of the end of their vocation, and the high price of their redemption, are intoxicated with an inordinate love of this present and transitory life, prepossessed with its prejudices, solitudes and cares; and who, though without positively renouncing the blessings of the life to come, yet think and act, as if at their death every thing were to die with them. Nothing, therefore, is more unjust and ill grounded than the assertion of those, who to excuse their indifference respecting the concerns of their eternity, pretend that it is next to impossible to live in the world and to be saved. Alas! to their great confusion and endless misery they will be one day obliged

to acknowledge and confess that "their destruction was their own."—Hosea xiii. 9. And that one can be saved in the world, and attain to the highest perfection in the world. I entertain a confident hope that through the mercy of God, who has presented you with the sweetness of his blessings, you will offer a fresh example of this consoling and encouraging truth.

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## II.

### THE NECESSITY OF VIGILANCE AND PRECAUTIONS TO ESCAPE THE DANGERS OF THE WORLD.

The happy and virtuous inclinations in which you are born, and which divine grace has fortified and improved, dispense me from the unpleasant and painful task of guarding you against the glaring disorders, and bare-faced immoralities too prevalent in this corrupt age. Were vice to present itself to you without mask or disguise, and in its naked deformity, in vain it would attempt to seduce you from the paths of innocence and piety; it would find all the avenues to your heart shut up against its most alluring pleasures. Its sole name, nay its shadow would be sufficient to make you turn away from it with disgust and inspire you with horror.

But I should betray your confidence, and the duties which my spiritual relations with you impose upon me, if I did not forewarn you of the dangers to which, notwithstanding your good dispositions, you still remain exposed, and teach you the means which religion supplies us with to strengthen and confirm our resolutions, and render our conversion solid and lasting. It is indeed confessed that respecting our religious, as well as with

our ordinary conduct, the fundamental and most important article is sincerity or uprightness of heart, and goodness of intention. At the same time, let the intentions be ever so pure and sincere, they will be in hazard of falling into wrong direction, unless they be properly guided by wisdom. Our intercourse with our fellow-creatures furnishes us every day instances of persons who, setting out in life with fair and virtuous purposes, have been so far bewildered by mistaken forms of goodness as to be betrayed, first into errors, and then into vices and disorders of which they thought themselves entirely incapable. What you have especially to fear, is the secret influence of the false maxims which you will hear daily repeated around you. It is that pretended liberality of opinions and sentiments which is so highly extolled as the benefit of an enlightened age, the necessary consequence of the march of intellect, and which in reality is nothing else but a shameful and thoughtless indifference respecting error and truth, vice and virtue. It is the seducing influence and example of those human virtues and worldly accomplishments which are cried up as the sole qualifications requisite to entitle us to an eternal reward. You cannot be too much upon your guard. You are walking among snares so much the more dangerous that they are hidden under your feet, and covered over by inviting and odoriferous flowers. Young and inexperienced as still you are, you cannot conceive an adequate idea of the powerful influence which is exercised upon our minds by the discourses and actions of those with whom we daily associate. "With the elect thou wilt be elect, and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted."—Isaiah xvii. 27. We seldom examine the principles by which we are actuated. We see what others are doing; and when it is not strikingly wrong, but has an appearance of propriety and

weight, we imitate it without further reflection. Thus we are by insensible degrees, and almost irresistibly led to consider as amiable what others love, and as true what they believe to be so. The most restraining, hard, and dangerous states of life are cheerfully embraced, because we see others of our rank and age do it, whilst the easiest precepts are resisted as a galling yoke, because the generality of men look upon them as unimportant, mean, or too painful. Let us examine the motives which direct their choice of a state of life, what prompts them to adopt fashions and customs, and we shall discover that in almost every circumstance they are the sport of the opinions of others, heedlessly following the sentiments and manners of those of their age, condition, or country, and that very seldom reason, truth, and religion influence their determination.

Besides the dangers which arise from the connexions we have with those around us, there are others which come from ourselves, and against which we ought most particularly to be upon our guard. We carry within our breast secret enemies that are constantly at work to seduce and entrap us. Such is the sophistry of self-love, that when we feel ourselves virtuously inclined, we are apt to rely with too great a confidence upon our own strength; hence, we neglect those little precautions which, however, are the outguards and fences of the highest perfections; and flattering ourselves that we can without great difficulty withstand every danger, overcome every temptation, we walk with security in the midst of precipices into which the slightest deviation from the straight road, a false step, or the least distraction will make us fall, and where, if not meeting with an immediate death, we cannot escape receiving dangerous wounds, which a long space of time, the most skilful physician, and the most efficacious remedies will scarcely

be able to heal. It is for this very reason that the exercise of vigilance, self-distrust, and abnegation, are so often and so forcibly recommended in the Holy Scriptures: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."—1 Cor. x. 12.

There is nothing to be neglected in our life, all in it has a latent and particular end, and may be of great profit or mischief. The occurrences which we so frequently and rashly attribute to mere chance, produce effects, which by powerful, though invisible springs, lead either to our perseverance in virtue or to our utter ruin. Each instant of our mortal existence, each word we speak, a glance of the eye, a smile, a transient thought, each pulsation of our heart, is attended with eternal consequences. "I say unto you," said our Lord, "that every word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment."—Matth. xii. 26.

I hope that these observations will not hurt your delicate feelings, and make you suspect that I have some doubts on the steadiness of your resolutions. By no means. I know that the only motives which have actuated you in the important and generous step which you have taken, and are now animating your soul, were to please God and work out your salvation. You do not stand in need of being spurred on. You are thoroughly convinced of the truth of this Gospel maxim: "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul."—Matt. viii. 36. You want rather to be kept within bounds than to be excited to greater exertions; and I think that I can with safety apply to you this advice of St. Paul: "Be not more wise than it behoveth to be wise, but be wise into sobriety."—Rom. xii. 3. But as long as we live we shall daily experience that we are weak, frail, and prone to

evil. Many years passed in the exemption of grievous faults (for to many imperfections we shall always be subject), and employed in the practice of good works, cannot afford an infallible assurance that we shall never fall. It is to distrust of themselves, assiduous prayer, constant vigilance, and carefully keeping themselves at a distance from dangerous occasions, that the greatest saints owed the precious gift of perseverance. Indeed it is an uncontrovertible truth grounded on the words of God himself in many passages of the Holy Scriptures, and confirmed by daily experience, that the cause of almost all the mistakes and crimes which swell the melancholy catalogue of human miseries, is to be attributed to a want of attention and vigilance. If the just themselves so frequently fall, and after a long series of victories over the most powerful enemies, are sometimes overcome and subdued in the slightest conflicts, and lose in a moment the fruit of their labours and many hard-fought battles; it is because feeling no longer the revolts of nature and the violent assaults which had kept them alive to a sense of the dangers which always threaten us, and being lulled in a treacherous calm, they looked back with a secret complacency on what they had done, and considering themselves invulnerable, they gave up as unnecessary, or performed with tepidity and negligence the indispensable duty of incessant prayer and watching. Hence this precept of our Lord: "Watch ye and pray, that you enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."—Mark xiv. 38. "What I say to you, I say to all, pray."—Mark xiii. 37. "Watch ye, praying at all times."—Luke xxi. 36.

It is especially in the beginning of a conversion that we ought to be on our guard, distrust our natural weakness, and that inconsiderate presumption to which, from



the pride always lurking more or less in the recesses of our heart, we are too apt to give way. Otherwise, the consciousness of our frailty and weakness would inspire us with deep sentiments of humility, and notwithstanding the feeling of sensible devotion, with which we may be favoured now and then, impress us with the necessity of praying and imploring without intermission the assistance of heaven. For, so much the more ardent as the desires of advancing in virtue have been, the more attentive and cautious ought we to be, not to expose the operation of grace and mercies of the Lord over us to trials and perils. A sign of the Spirit of God dwelling in our souls, is a fear of ourselves, and our great and continual frailty. Let us seriously reflect that that which renders a man criminal in the temptations he may have to encounter, is not only his intention to yield to them, it is also his imprudence and temerity in seeking them, or his proud presumption in thinking himself capable of resisting them without great trouble.

If our most holy resolutions be not proof against the inconstancy of our weak hearts; if we be to ourselves an incessant occasion of temptations; if we find it so very difficult to get the better of our dislikes, to overcome our fears, subdue our repugnances, and prevent that fickleness and instability of temper, which make us one day appear in the highest spirits and the next day low and dejected; if it be only by perpetual and violent efforts that we can stem the torrent and be preserved from shipwreck: in short, if all that is within us is sin or occasion of sin, how can we be safe in the midst of dangers of our own choice and seeking? Has a sick man of a debilitated constitution, and already suffering by contagious disease, nothing to fear from breathing a pestilential air fatal to the most healthy and robust?

We must not judge ourselves by that sensible fervour

which we usually feel at our first entrance in the paths of virtue and piety. True and solid piety does not consist in transitory and evanescent feelings, but in a lasting fidelity in the accomplishment of God's commandments, and in a constant discharge of the respective duties of our condition. It is not the sudden emotion of a tender heart, but a permanent and steady disposition of faith and compunction. It is not a spark which as quickly disappears as it was lighted, it is a burning and bright lamp which withstands for a long time the overwhelming blast of the tempest, and continues to point out to us the straight road of truth and eternal life. What makes us persevere in a state of grace, is not the vivacity of the sentiments which we experienced when first it took possession of our heart. It is our constancy in taking all the precautions necessary to keep off the dangers which surround us; it is not only an ardent zeal at the onset, it is a continual and indefatigable vigilance and steadiness in the pursuit.

If to become a saint, some transitory acts of courage, or violence over themselves were only requisite, few men would have a great objection and repugnance to sanctity, and the attaining of it they would not consider, as is too generally the case, as a hard and almost insuperable task. Indeed, unless we be destitute of every generous sentiment and abandoned to a callousness and numbness of soul, we shall find within ourselves an innate love and esteem of all that is noble and honourable, and a principle of courage which, in some particular circumstances, may for a short time put together and bring to action all the energies both of our soul and body, and render us capable of the most extraordinary and heroic exertions; the high importance of the end, the glory of the success, and the short duration of the struggle, alleviating in great measure, its difficulties and pains. What fatigues

and discourages in the practice of virtue, is that we can never say, that we can now be at rest; that we shall have nothing more to do, and that to a sacrifice made, will not succeed the occasion, nay even the obligation of making another, which will command fresh efforts and courage. In short, in some particular cases and times, it is not very difficult to be strong and fearless. What is hard and very painful to our weak nature, is to be every where, at all times steady, faithful, and courageous. Courage and steadiness are necessary to succeed in all undertakings and occurrences of life; of course it is impossible to be a true Christian without them. The word *virtue*, is synonymous with, or implies *strength* and fortitude. But let us observe, that the courage of a Christian, is not a courage of fits and starts, but a courage of patience, firmness, attention, self-denial, and perseverance; and that not a single day of our mortal existence will pass, without our having some way or other an occasion of exercising it.

What are the practical inferences to be drawn from these truths? That the sincerity of your resolutions, your lively faith, and the fervour of your devotion; in a word, that the pious sentiments which at present animate and guide you, do not dispense you from the duty of distrusting your weakness, watching on all the motions of your heart, and taking all the precautions which reason and religion prescribe to fortify and improve us in virtue. Do not imagine that that self-diffidence to which I exhort you, will render you timid to an excess, narrow-minded, anxious about trifles, or pusillanimous. On the contrary, the consciousness of our being weak, is the first foundation of our subsequent strength. An infirm person who feels his debility, finds a real resource in this very feeling, because it induces him to call for a support and friendly arm to help him to walk. Such is the conduct

of the enlightened Christian, persuaded that he can do nothing by himself, but that he can do every thing with him who is the strength of the weak and the light of the blind, he implores his assistance with heartfelt confidence. This conviction banishes pusillanimity, and is a sure preservative against presumption.

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### III.

#### THE GREAT UTILITY OF MEDITATING ON THE AWFUL TRUTHS OF RELIGION.

You will perhaps be surprised, that knowing, as I do, the motives which make a deeper impression upon your heart, and which have so powerfully contributed to the change which makes you now so happy, I could have thought that it might be useful to you to meditate on these words of the apostle, "With fear and trembling work out your salvation."—Philip. ii. 12. It seems to me that I hear you say, am I in need of being reminded of these awful truths? Let them be presented to the daily consideration of those mean and servile souls that cannot be deterred from the violation of the commandments of God, but by the terror of the severity of his judgments. But to me, thanks be rendered to him, these means are not necessary. You well know, that it was by representing to me his infinite mercy and his unspeakable love for the work of his hands, that I was roused from that spiritual lethargy and indifference in which I had till then lived without concern. That I begun to feel the strict obligation of learning what he required of me, and the strong inspirations of his divine grace, sweetly working in my heart, I was at length

brought to acknowledge, that I could never be happy unless I was united to him, and that so desirable a union I could never enjoy but in the bosom of the Catholic Church. Why then would not the same noble and disinterested motives be sufficient now and for the future to render me obedient to his adorable will, and faithful to my sacred engagements?

God forbid that I should cast a damp upon your spirits, and weaken the holy and generous sentiments with which your gratitude towards our most amiable Saviour, and the lively remembrance of his benefits have penetrated your heart. No, I highly approve, praise, and admire your dispositions. I congratulate with you for this inestimable proof of his predilection over your soul. Yet, since "he set in order charity in you" (Cant. ii. 4), and "draws you to him with the cords of Adam, with bands of love" (Hosea xi.), do not resist the sweet impulse; "run after the odour of his ointments."—Cant. i. 3. Enjoy the supernatural delight of loving the never fading and eternal beauty. Often repeat with the great St. Austin, "O beauty! so old, and always new, why have I been so long without knowing and loving thee? but since thou hast now taken possession of my heart, do, I beseech thee, O Lord, reign alone and for ever in it. It seems to me that I can say with St. Peter, 'Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.'" But were you already such as I hope you will be one day; were you one of those predestinated souls, who feeling the too procrastinated duration of their pilgrimage, are continually sighing after their heavenly country, "having a desire to be dissolved and be with Christ" (Philip. i. 23), were you after their example, although still living in the flesh, become, by the vivacity of your faith, and the holiness of your conduct, almost a stranger to the feelings of our corrupt nature, and the vicissitudes of this transitory life; were you "no longer

living to yourself, but unto him who died for you and rose again?" (2 Cor. v. 15); yet I should not hesitate to tell you, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Because, as long as we have not attained to that state of impeccability of which the beloved disciple says, that "perfect charity puts away fear." (1 John iv. 18), the great, the indispensable rule is to unite in practice fear and hope, tempering as it were, the one by the other. These two virtues are two faithful companions, and affectionate sisters, whose assistance we stand in need in order to obtain the perfection and security of divine love. Although hope may flow from the purest source, yet if it remain long unmixed with fear, it is apt to become dangerous to virtue. Unguarded and too confident hope begets indolence, indolence produces security, security leads to rashness, and rashness ends in ruin. Hope fortifies and supports us, lest we should faint from weariness and fall in the way; fear preserves us on the brink of the precipice, or brings us back to the straight road, when we begin to wander away from it. The first is the prop of our tottering steps. The second is an efficacious restraint and curb against our too natural inconstancy, rashness, or presumption. "Ye that fear the Lord hope in him, and mercy shall come to you for your delight."—Eccles. ii. 9.

Do not, therefore, imitate those pious but over fearful and pusillanimous people, who under the specious pretence of not exposing themselves to the temptation of discouragement, and perhaps without being aware of it—so insidious are the suggestions of pride, not to be confounded with the generality of the faithful, who consider the meditating on the awful truths of the Gospel as very useful, nay, even as necessary means to help them to walk with steady steps in the midst of the dangers against which the most eminent virtues too often meet a

shipwreck—sedulously remove from their mind the thoughts of death, judgment, or hell, and will never hear or read but that which is sweet and consoling? Were I to meet with such characters, I should tell them, has not Jesus Christ, who is the infallible master to whom we ought to listen with blind obedience, whom we cannot suspect of the least exaggeration, or of not knowing what best suits our nature, and is best calculated to deter us from vice, and strengthen us in the practice of virtue, addressed this remarkable admonition to his beloved Apostles? “I say to you, my friends, be not afraid of them who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I shall show you whom ye shall fear: fear ye him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell. Yea, I say to you, fear him.”—Luke xii. 4, 5. St. Paul, who by his faithful and constant correspondence with grace, and the multitude of his labours and sufferings in the propagation of the Gospel, could, without presumption say of himself, “There is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render me in that day” (2 Tim. iv. 8); yet, struck with terror at the thought of the strict account he was to give before the unerring tribunal of the sovereign Judge, is still persuaded that it was necessary for him “to chastise his body, and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps, when he had preached to others, he himself should become a castaway.”—1 Cor. ix. 27. And we who are yet so very weak, and have so very few good works to rely upon, encompassed on all sides with internal as well as external dangers, we should neglect, or disdain as beneath our superior virtue, considerations ordained by Jesus Christ, and which his most favoured saints thought they could not lay aside with impunity or safety.

Let us not therefore separate what the divine Author

of our religion would have to be constantly united. Let us now and then meditate on the severe punishment which awaits the impenitent sinner, as well as the immense rewards reserved for the just that persevere in justice. Do not imagine that these grave and serious meditations will throw you into sadness or melancholy. Jesus Christ who ordains us to fear, assures us that his yoke is sweet and his burden light. Does not St. Paul, who had recommended to those whom he had instructed, to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, invite them again and again to rejoice in the Lord? And, speaking of himself, did he not say, "I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy."—2 Cor. vii. 4. These awful truths are terrifying only to the wicked, obstinately bent to gratify his criminal passion. To him, I confess, they are an inexhaustible source of black thoughts, fell remorse, dreadful forebodings and dismay. But to the just they are a principle of holy joy, because by preserving them from sin, they procure them that peace of soul and tranquillity of conscience which here below are the sole and surest means of obtaining comfort and happiness. Moreover, what can be more efficacious to disabuse us from the illusions of a deceitful world, and convince us of the vanity of all that is passing away with time, than the consideration of the eternal misery which is to be one day the inevitable consequence of a sinful life? What can be more powerful to make us resist the most seducing temptations, and encourage us under the most severe trials, than on one side, the idea that if we yield, we shall prepare for ourselves an eternity of woes; and on the other, that our resistance and fortitude will be rewarded to the hundredfold in the heavenly mansions, where it will be soon rendered to every one according to his works.

How well-grounded and useful these reflections are;



and though of course they deserve our utmost attention, yet it must be acknowledged that in practice the application of them may admit some exceptions. As the most substantial food and best remedies are not to be indiscriminately given to every individual; because, what can fortify and invigorate a strong and healthy constitution, may be injurious to a delicate, weak, and sickly one, and instead of restoring a decayed strength, increase the weakness, and sometimes prove mortal. So it is with the maxims of the soundest morality; though always true, they are not always applicable to every case. The time, circumstances, state of life, age, sex, turn of mind, natural dispositions, ought to enter into consideration. The readings or meditations which are of a general use, even which may be necessary to some to deter them from vice, and animate them to aspire to the most eminent virtues, may be to timorous and scrupulous souls an occasion of anxieties, troubles of conscience, dejection of mind, despondency, and sometimes of despair: "I gave you milk to drink, and not meat, for you were not able as yet," says St. Paul,—1 Cor. iii. 2. And our Saviour, speaking to his apostles: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."—John xvi. 12. Therefore, respecting the subjects of our meditations, in order to know and put in practice what is most conducive to our spiritual good, we must examine with impartiality which are the truths that by experience we have found inspiring us with a greater horror of sin, a more profound humility, distrust of ourselves, more ardent love of God, an unbounded confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ; and which animate us with a more fervent zeal and steady courage in accomplishment of the divine commandments and in the daily performance of our domestic and social obligations. This exa-

mination being done, and having consulted our spiritual guide, we can, without scrupulosity, retrench or adopt what he will think best for the good of our soul.

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#### IV.

##### THE OBLIGATION OF ENTERTAINING IN US SENTIMENTS OF FAITH.

Faith being a most precious gift of Almighty God, we are strictly bound to do our utmost to entertain and increase it. Were we thoroughly persuaded, as we ought to be, of its necessity and great advantages, we should not let one single day pass without repeating with the apostles, "O Lord, increase our faith."—Luke xvii. 5. Now, nothing is more proper to produce this happy and desirable effect, nothing will be more conducive to keep always alive in your heart the pious sentiments with which you are penetrated, nothing will make you better understand the spirit and intentions of the Catholic Church, in the solemnities which she celebrates during the course of the year, and the meaning of her ceremonies and prayers, than frequent and solid reflections upon the mysteries which she proposes to our belief; for, the exterior worship which she has established, and each of its practices, have no other end, no other object but to promote the exercise of some virtue. Prayer, which is the expression of the sentiments of a pious heart, entertains piety. The solemnities, by recalling to our remembrance the benefits of God in our regard, excite our gratitude for them. The ceremonies, by helping us through the medium of the senses to raise our thoughts towards the sovereign good, incite us to adore and love God. Fast-

ings remind us of the obligation of mortification, and oblige us to put it in practice. The good works which charity commands are, at the same time, its firmest bond and support. In short, the interior worship is to the exterior, what the soul is to the body. If we divest the exterior worship from the sentiments which vivify it, nothing will remain but a corpse, which soon will moulder away and fall into corruption.

The magnificence and stateliness of our basilisks, the splendour and pomp of our solemnities, the richness of the sacred vases and vestments used by our priests in the performance of their sacerdotal functions, the ornaments of our altars, the waxed tapers, and precious perfumes burning in some parts of our church service. The representation of some particular circumstances of the life, or miracles of our Divine Saviour, and of the saints painted on the walls of our temples, have spiritual objects in view, and are indicative of the inward sentiments with which the Christian ought to be animated. The cross is erected in the most prominent and conspicuous place, in order to attract the first looks of the faithful, and put them in mind that the prayers and supplications which they are going to offer up to the Almighty cannot be heard and accepted by him, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ crucified; that in him we have a great high priest that has passed into heaven, always living to make intercession for us, and has compassion on them that are ignorant and err; therefore, "that we may present ourselves with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy in seasonable aid."—Heb. iv. 16. The baptismal fonts placed at the entrances of our churches, recal to our remembrance, that we have been regenerated to a new life, and that no one can enter into the kingdom of heaven, unless he be born again of the water and the

Holy Ghost. The tribunals of penance point out to the repenting sinner, that he ought not to give way to despair, but that there is a plank left to him after shipwreck. The sanctuary reserved to the ministers of the Gospel, and yet to which are admitted all those, rich or poor, learned and unlearned, who wish to nourish their souls with the bread of life, the flesh of the immaculate Lamb, and from which none are excluded but infidels and sinners, most forcibly shows, that before God, there is no exception of persons, and with him virtue alone is a title to distinction and favours. The water with which we are invited to sprinkle our foreheads, when we have passed the sacred threshold, and which is called holy on account of the spiritual blessings which we beg the Almighty to bestow upon those who use it, is an emblem of the purity of heart necessary to enter with confidence into the house of prayer, where invisibly resides the Sovereign Lord of all Things—the sensible signs, particular rites enjoined by the Catholic Church in her exterior worship, and the origin of which in all civilized nations, may be traced up to the cessation of the persecutions to which she had been exposed during three centuries, have not been invented and maintained, as those who dissent from our doctrine reproach us, as a vain and idle supplement of that interior worship, which has its seat in the heart, and ought to be carried on by the inward sentiments of faith, hope, adoration, gratitude and love; a supplement only fit for weak and superstitious minds, and which can have no other effect, but to gratify the silly fondness of ignorant men for pageantry and show. But if we reflect for ever so little, we shall soon be compelled to acknowledge, that those reproaches are quite groundless, that all the observances, ceremonies, and practices of the exterior Catholic worship, are most admirably calculated by preventing the wanderings of the

imagination, and striking the senses, to raise the minds above temporal things, impress the hearts with a thorough conviction of the awful majesty of God, and remove in part, and as far as human weakness of supporting, the veil which hides from mortal eyes the unfathomable depth of the mercies of the Most High over the children of men. In fine, that that exterior worship is for the unlearned, who always compose the most numerous part of mankind, a tacit instruction, which most effectually prepares their minds to understand the explanation of the mysteries of religion, when they hear it from the pulpit.

If we neglect to be instructed, or to recal to our attention the instructions which we have received, we shall be exposed by insensible degrees to the danger of having but a very weak faith, and even of losing it entirely. For, when the dogmas of religion, which have chiefly for their object truths, above the senses, are but imperfectly known, or very seldom present to the mind, worldly maxims easily gain an admittance into it; and thus, without being aware of the mischief, we receive impressions, adopt opinions contrary to faith and to the morality of the Gospel; and thus illusions are taken for undeniable principles, which form a false conscience. From a want of solid instruction, grievous faults are looked upon as slight imperfections, and one is gradually induced to lay aside indispensable duties, the ignorance of which however cannot justify before God, because the means of knowing them were near at hand, and were wilfully neglected. Do not, therefore, flatter yourself, that satisfied with the knowledge of our doctrine which you have acquired, you can now, without inconvenience, shut up for ever the books which have contributed to remove the prejudices of your education, and bring you back to the bosom of the Catholic Church.

You will never meet with a Christian, unless he has

openly renounced his religion, who will not acknowledge, at least in theory, that we are obliged to love God with our whole heart and our whole mind. But is it not a downright mockery to pretend to fulfil this precept, and yet to refuse or neglect to study his holy law from a secret fear of knowing it too well, and being thereby compelled to perform all the obligations it imposes upon us ? And is this not the case with many people who call themselves Christians ? Living in the midst of a world, where fidelity to the divine commandments is looked upon and stigmatized as an intemperate or exaggerated zeal, and where the evangelical maxims are either laid aside, and so much modified or altered by the interpretations of the passions, that it is next to impossible to discover in them a remote similarity with the lessons of our Divine Master, and the manners of the first Christians ; how easy it is to persuade oneself, that one has fulfilled all justice, whilst one is guilty of many transgressions in the sight of Him who is “ the searcher of hearts and reins.”

Let us examine ourselves seriously in the silence of the passions ; perhaps we have never done, nor even thought to do it. Do we not owe to God as much as a friend to his friend, a servant to his master ? Well, if you had a friend, to whom you had rendered the most essential services, and given many proofs of the most zealous and tender friendship, what would you think of him, if, knowing but imperfectly and superficially what you desired of him, he would not take the least trouble to be better acquainted with your intentions, and thus run the risk of doing you a real injury ? Could you rely upon the sincerity of his warm protestations of devotedness, were he to tell you, if not by his words, at least by his conduct, “ I should be very sorry indeed to offend you, or do you any essential harm. It seems to me that I understand pretty well the affair, the management of

which you have intrusted to my care. This is enough for me. To make further inquiries, would occasion me some trouble. It is true that they might ensure a success, but I do not like to be disturbed, or to be put out of my way; I prefer that you should suffer from my carelessness and indifference." It seems to me that such a man you would consider as quite unworthy of bearing the name of a friend, be shocked at his ingratitude, and yourself ashamed of having put your confidence in him. I am persuaded that you would judge such proceedings as unequivocal proofs of a vile, treacherous, and corrupted heart. Yet, what we condemn with so much reason in a mortal friend who owes us almost nothing, is too striking an image of our conduct towards God, to whom we owe all that which we are, possess, and can wish for. And as we cannot deceive him by fair but false appearances, what will be our lot when we shall be summoned before his awful tribunal? Do not conclude from these reflections, that I want you to consider the God whom we adore and are obliged to serve with fidelity, as an austere and implacable master and judge, who forgives nothing and will punish with severity the least imperfections. No, assuredly; my motive has been to show you only the necessity of a solid instruction, as the surest means to animate you with fervour and secure perseverance in the accomplishment of your duties.

In effect, although you are at present free from doubts, yet the ancient might revive, and new ones arise. The circumstances in which you are, obliging you to live habitually in the society of Protestants and Freethinkers, and of course being daily exposed to hear conversations, in which the principles of the religion which you now profess are artfully attacked, if not by direct and pointed arguments, at least by a captious sophistry, and by the still more dangerous arm of irony, sarcasm, and ridicule;

in order not to be staggered in your belief, and to be always ready "to give an account of the faith which is in you," you are in a greater need than any other, to have constantly present to your mind the evidences upon which our religion is grounded. Hence, the necessity for you to be more and more instructed. Apply, therefore, to yourself the precept which Moses, by the order of God, gave to the Jews: "These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart . . . thou shalt meditate upon them, sitting in thy house, and walking in thy journey, sleeping and rising. Thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand; and they shall be and shall move between thy eyes, and thou shalt write them in the entry and on the doors of thy house."—Deut. vi. 6, 7, 8, 9.

I need not tell you that this passage of the Holy Scriptures which I have just quoted to you, is not to be literally taken, but in a moral acceptance. The mind of man in this transitory life, is not capable of so close and uninterrupted application on spiritual things. You will therefore easily understand, that it implies only the high importance and strict obligation of being thoroughly instructed in, and making the law of God the habitual subject of serious meditations, and that among our daily occupations it ought to hold the first place. It is what Jesus Christ himself prescribes in other words, when he says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things will be added unto you".—Luke xii. 31. Which words clearly indicate, that after having given to the study of religion and our immortal concerns the necessary time, we are not only allowed, but even authorized to occupy ourselves about our temporal interests, in order to be enabled to accomplish our respective duties as members of society—otherwise, we could not observe with propriety and justice the other precept, to



“render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s, as well as to God the things that are God’s.”—Luke xx. 25.

It seems to me that in the distribution of your time, you could, with great profit, dedicate some part of it in readings, which would successively recal to your remembrance the undeniable and most striking evidences of the divinity of the Christian religion, the dogmas we ought to believe, and the principles of morality which must be in every circumstance the invariable rule of our conduct. The method which I should advise you to adopt, would be to read one after another, some of the best apologies of Christianity against the pretended philosophers or freethinkers of the age, then some solid refutation of the calumnies or misrepresentations of Protestants respecting the doctrine and practices of the Catholic Church, treatises upon the Symbol, the Decalogue, the Sacraments, the duty of Prayer, the three Virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the ceremonies used by the Church in her exterior worship, and in the administration of the sacraments. Were you to employ only ten or fifteen minutes a day in such an interesting occupation, you would have read at the end of the year more than twelve volumes; which reading would acquaint you, without the least fatigue, with all that has been published most perfect upon matters of religion and morality.

To this plan you will perhaps object, that you do not want to learn your catechism over again, and that you cannot, as yet, have forgotten what has been the subject of your studies and most serious considerations. To this, I shall not reply; (because I confess that such an answer is not in the smallest degree applicable to you.) But generally speaking, I might say, without fear of being contradicted, that one meets too often in the world with ladies who have received the most brilliant education, and who by their natural and acquired accomplishments,

their knowledge of profane history, ancient and modern languages, geography, fine arts, belles-lettres, &c. &c., might contend with equal arms with the most learned and elegant writers, yet would be at a loss to give a plain and clear explanation of the articles of their catechism, and of the motives and the spirit of such or such solemnities of the Catholic Church. What is for Catholics the almost inevitable result of this gross and unpardonable ignorance? The most insignificant objections appear to them insoluble difficulties. In spite of their best endeavours they are frequently disturbed by doubts about faith, which fill their conscience with anxiety and trouble. Being destitute of that profound conviction of the mind and intimate persuasion of the heart, which support the enlightened Christian under the hardest trials, and replenish him with the sweetest consolations, they fulfil their religious duties by mere habit, by main force, with a secret repugnance, and too often finish by seeking a treacherous relief of their constraint and perplexities, in the dissipations of the world.

Although I do not reckon you in the number of these unhappy, inconsiderate, ignorant, and in truth but nominal Christians, I however think that you will reap great benefit from the plan which I have taken the liberty of recommending to you. The science of religion is like other sciences; in order to remain undiminished, it must carefully and continually be cultivated. From want of study or practice, we shall at length retain but a vague and superficial knowledge of the things which we knew the best. In every department of arts or literature, among those who have particularly distinguished themselves by their talents, consult whomsoever you please, he will bear witness to this truth; he will tell you that the knowledge and abilities which he had acquired by long and incessant labour, would be gradually lessened, and

ultimately lost, were he not to preserve them unimpaired by habitual practice, or exercise. Have you not said to me yourself, that your long abode in France and the rare opportunities you had of speaking or writing in English, had made you lose in some degree, that fluency of speech, and correctness of style you possessed before, and that in order to teach your daughter in a proper manner, you have been obliged to learn, as it were, the lessons which you had to give her.

Now, how shall we resist the influence of the sensible objects which encompass us on all sides, and which all of them either directly or indirectly tend to make us forget the truths of religion, if we do not endeavour to counteract this influence by an enlightened and lively faith? And how shall we preserve it undiminished, if never or seldom it is the subject of our thoughts and reflections? In religion, every article is connected and linked together. The morality of the Gospel cannot be separated from its doctrines; they reciprocally support and enforce one another. We are to obey the precepts of Jesus Christ, not only because they appear to us conformable to reason, and truly sublime, but because they have been enjoined by Him who is the Sovereign Truth, and has an uncontrovertible right to command our ready and unreserved obedience. Such have been the motives which have induced me to advise you to meditate frequently on the truths of faith, as well as on the precepts of morality.

## V.

ARE MORAL PRECEPTS THE ONLY THINGS NECESSARY TO  
KNOW AND BE ATTENDED TO IN RELIGION ?

Principles utterly unknown to our ancestors, and very seducing to unreflecting minds, because they seem to imply liberality of sentiments, and goodness of heart, have, of late years, found their way into the world, and gained many zealous advocates, even among men who glory in the name of Christians, and sometimes also among Catholics. It is confidently asserted, that it is of very little importance, whether such or such articles of faith are adopted or rejected ; that the only thing essential and truly necessary, is to attend to morals. A very strange assertion indeed, from which it might be inferred that one can with safety raise an edifice, before having first laid the foundations ! But let it be asked which are the articles of faith which can, without fear or concern, be laid aside as useless or indifferent ? Is it the existence of God, a providence, a state of future retribution in which justice will reign without contradiction, virtue be rewarded and vice punished ? But from the belief in these articles of faith, all the ideas of order, harmony, and probity among men, derive their efficacy and power.

Without the knowledge of these so highly interesting and important truths which we have acquired from revelation, the circumstances of man would be extremely forlorn. He finds himself placed here as a stranger in a vast universe, where the powers and operations of nature are very imperfectly known ; where the beginnings and issues of things are involved in mysterious darkness,

where he is unable to discover with any certainty whence he sprung, or for what purpose he was brought into this state of existence, whether he be subjected to the government of a mild or wrathful ruler, what construction he is to put on many dispensations of his providence; what his fate is to be when he departs hence. What a disconsolate situation to a serious inquiring mind. The greater degree of virtue it possesses, its sensibility is likely to be more oppressed by this burden of labouring thought, even were it in our power to banish all uneasy forebodings, and to fill up the hours of life with perpetual amusement. Life so filled up, would upon reflection appear poor and trivial. But these are far from being the terms upon which man is brought into this world. He is, it is true, conscious that his being is frail and feeble; he sees himself beset with various dangers, and is exposed to many a melancholy apprehension from the evils he may have to encounter before he arrive at the close of life. But in this distressed situation, such discoveries of the Supreme Being as the Christian religion affords, have revealed to him a father and a friend, and let in a ray of the most cheering light upon the darkness of the human estate. He who was before a destitute orphan, wandering in an inhospitable desert has now gained a shelter from the bitter and inclement blast. He now knows to whom to pray and in whom to trust, where to unbosom his sorrows, and from what to look for relief. Refined reasonings concerning the nature of the human condition, and the improvement which philosophy teaches to make of every event, may entertain the mind when it is at ease, and may perhaps contribute when slightly wounded with sorrow, to afford him some relief; but when it is torn with sore distress they are cold and feeble, compared with a direct promise from the word of God. This is "an

anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast."—Heb. vi. 19. This has given consolation and refuge to many a virtuous heart, at a time when the most cogent reasonings had proved utterly unavailing.

As for the dogmas and mysteries which the Catholic Church teaches ; it cannot be looked upon as a matter of indifference either to believe or disbelieve them ; nor can they be laid aside as objects of mere speculation. For, if we reflect for ever so little upon her doctrine and precepts we shall be compelled to confess that they are grounded upon, and have an inseparable connexion with the mysteries revealed by Jesus Christ, consequently that they must have a very great influence on the moral conduct of men ; and when frequently and seriously meditated upon, add an almost irresistible power to the dictates of their conscience. If our reason be not biassed by strong prejudices, or perverted by unruly passions ; if we be sincerely desirous to know the truth, and walk in the paths of virtue, we shall find in the meditation of our mysteries the most powerful motives of working our salvation with an incessant and unabated zeal, and an inexhaustible source of pious sentiments and pure delights. If on one side they be above our understanding, on the other they raise and extend our thoughts and expectations beyond the narrow limits of this sublunary world, and by captivating our minds under the obedience of faith, they purify and sanctify our hearts by imposing upon us the necessity of tending to the highest perfection. If they be obscure in their principle, they diffuse the most cheering light in their consequences, and make us see things as they have been revealed by the eternal truth, and of course as they really are in themselves.

In effect, what gives us sublime ideas of the Deity, of that unerring justice which no one can seduce or de-

ceive, of that unspeakable goodness always inclined to console the afflicted, and revive the drooping spirits ; what enlightens man on his origin and on his future destiny ; what humbles him without letting him fall into dejection or despondency, and elevates him without inspiring with pride ; what is capable of disabusing him of his errors, delivering him from vices and animating him to the most generous efforts and heroic actions ; all this undoubtedly tends to improve his nature, and make him more virtuous, and therefore has a necessary relation to morals. Now, that all these most precious advantages are derived from the knowledge and meditation of the mysteries and doctrines which are contained in the creed of the Catholic religion, cannot be called in question. Give me leave to fix your attention on some few of them, and make you sensible of their salutary influence.

That original and hereditary fault which has corrupted mankind in their principle, and stripped them from their primeval innocence and grandeur, is, indeed, a profound and impenetrable mystery. What an invaluable knowledge on his destiny, and the otherwise inexplicable contradictions of his nature, does not the positive and unquestionable revelation of this mystery give man ! If we consult reason alone, and listen to its suggestions or conjectures, we shall be involved in a maze of doubts and difficulties which we shall never be able to solve. We shall be tempted to be scandalized and to murmur at that inconceivable mixture of low and abject passions, and noble and heavenly desires, of ardent love for virtue, and violent propensity to vice, which alternately pervade our souls. We shall never be able to comprehend that almost irresistible dominion which the senses exercise over our judgments and actions, and account for the disorders and calamities of which they are the inevitable consequences. Thus we should remain an inexplicable enigma

to ourselves, which the most acute and profound geniuses could never unravel. Who will deliver us from the dismal uncertainty in which our ignorance on this important subject leaves us? Will it be said that there is no God, and that a blind chance is the supreme and sole ruler of this universe? But such an impious and criminal opinion is not a light in our darkness, nor a resource in our wants, it is a sign of a distracted mind, a downright frenzy. Rather than fall into and perish in this frightful abyss, reason alone would lead us to believe that there is, in that unaccountable mixture of good and evil in our nature, some hidden truth which our limited mental faculties cannot discover. But let us consult religion and all our perplexities are immediately removed. A ray of a propitious light will dispel all at once the clouds which obscure our weak understanding, and which till then had rendered abortive all our attempts and inquiries. That highly important truth, of which it seems that some few heathen philosophers had obtained some faint and very imperfect notions, and the disfigured traces of which we find contained in the traditions of all the nations of the world; that truth which was meant by the fabulous history of Prometheus stealing from heaven the sacred fire, and in punishment of this sacrilegious theft drawing upon earth the scourges which bring on its unfortunate inhabitants ruin, desolation, and death; that truth which the poets of antiquity intended to convey to the minds of their readers by the imaginary description of a golden age and iron age, has been clearly and completely revealed to us by religion.

She teaches us that man did not come from the hands of the Creator such as we behold him in this present state of things; but that he is now but a degraded being, a dethroned king, still preserving in his disgrace



striking features of his primitive and noble birth. To speak to man only of the dignity of his nature, and of the goodness of his heart, notwithstanding the consciousness he has of his weakness and grovelling appetites, is only calculated to intoxicate him with an excessive love of himself, a senseless pride, and make of him a superb philosopher or an insensible stoic. To represent to him only his carnal inclinations, mean and base propensities, notwithstanding the feeling which he still retains of his innate generosity and nobleness, would be degrading him to the level of the brutes, authorizing him to adopt the shameful opinion of Epicurus, and to abandon himself without remorse to the basest voluptuousness. The doctrine of Christianity holds an admirable medium between these two extremes. It shows in man the image of God, disfigured, indeed, but not entirely effaced ; it teaches him to distrust himself without destroying the high ideas he ought still to preserve of the distinguished rank in which he has been placed in the scale of created beings. Thus from mysterious clouds shine forth unexpected and most satisfactory revelations on the nature of man, his contradictory dispositions, and the present order of things.

It is a profound mystery that God has vouchsafed to unite himself to our human nature. But how admirably does this mystery unravel and set out in a strong light the divine attributes and the dignity of our souls ! How awful must that eternal justice be, that could not be appeased but through the supplications and sufferings of a God-man ! How heinous must the malignity of sin be, which could not be expiated but through the death of such a victim ! But how ineffable is the goodness of this Divine Person who vouchsafed to humble and annihilate himself to such a degree ! And how precious must our souls have been in his sight, and valuable in themselves, to have been judged worthy of being re-

deemed at such a high and immense price! How powerful and efficacious must the belief of these truths be when deeply imprinted in the mind, to penetrate the heart with horror for the sins which offend so just and so merciful a God, inspire us with the most lively sentiments of gratitude and love towards him, and animate us with an indefatigable zeal to accomplish all his commandments!

The sacrament of the blessed Eucharist, such as it was believed by the whole Christian world before the sixteenth century, and is still believed by the greater number of Christians in every part of the globe where the Gospel has been preached, is also an incomprehensible mystery. But what an inexhaustible source it is of salutary waters diffusing fecundity and life in every country in which the Catholic Church exercises her sweet dominion and holy influence. The first participation in this adorable sacrament is proposed to the Catholic child as soon as his reason begins to peep forth, as a most precious, desirable, and important epoch, the expectation and remembrance of which will, as it were, last its whole life. What a strong motive to preserve its innocence undefiled, or to hasten to recover it, if already lost by sin! What an encouragement to display docility, submission, modesty, and a dread of whatever might expose its virtue to danger! For, in all the instructions which it has received, it has been continually and most forcibly inculcated to its mind, that it is only by an upright conduct, irreproachable manners, great purity of heart, sincere conversion, firm purpose of amendment, and fervent devotion, that we may be allowed to be admitted to the sacred banquet. Were the secrets of conscience open to you, you would see that it is to the belief of our Saviour being really present under the sacramental veil, that many Catholics owed

the perfection and sanctity to which they had attained. In order to prepare themselves to participate in what the Catholic Church calls "the most holy and tremendous mysteries," how many people have been induced to resist their corrupt propensities, overcome the most violent passions ! For this intention how often have not injuries been forgiven, injustices repaired, emotions of antipathy, hatred, and revenge restrained, stifled, and entirely subdued, poor assisted in their distress, and the most heroic actions performed ?

The mysteries peculiar to Christianity are not like those of the heathens. The mysteries among the latter were but a mixture and compound of fantastic fictions, vain and often impure ceremonies more calculated to destroy the sentiments of virtue than to inspire them. But in the Christian religion, the centre from which every thing proceeds, and to which every thing tends, refers, and terminates, is Jesus Christ, the light of the world by his doctrine, the Saviour of mankind by his death, their teacher and model by his examples as well as by his lessons. The mysteries of the birth, the life, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ, are only the moral precepts of the Gospel exemplified by practice, forming a complete and admirable assemblage of virtues, sublime and truly heavenly, yet plain and adapted to the most limited capacity and narrowest understanding. They teach us that the modesty of the sincere Christian does not consist only in the exterior demeanour, but that it must be grounded on and attended with profound humility ; that his meekness should not be confined to sweet and engaging manners towards others, but besides, show itself in a disposition and unequivocal determination to forgive all sorts of affronts or injuries ; his charity, not only in assisting the poor, but in loving his enemies, and doing good to those who do him evil ; his resignation in sti-

fling the first motions of impatience, complaint, or murmuring, but also in an unreserved obedience and submission under the most severe trials ; his chastity, not only in shunning and condemning every act, but even the least deliberate thought of impurity ; his fidelity to God in a readiness to suffer the most cruel tortures, nay death itself, rather than to infringe his holy law. Such are the distinctive characteristics of Christian virtues. But could they be put in practice, if they were not enforced by the authority and examples of Jesus Christ ? God-man, who commands and enjoins nothing but what we have seen him practising during the course of his mortal life ; always humble, meek, merciful, charitable, forgiving ; praying for those who crucified him, and offering the sacrifice of his life for them as well as for all mankind ?

In order to maintain in the moral world the admirable order which we behold in the physical world ; in order to raise the souls of men above vain fears and grovelling appetites, it is not only very advantageous, but even absolutely necessary to imprint deeply on their minds that they are living under the government of a supreme and infinitely wise Lawgiver who commands, and cannot be disobeyed with impunity ; that they are walking under the eyes of an omniscient God, who knows their most secret thoughts and desires as well as their external and most public actions ; that they shall one day be summoned before the awful tribunal of an unerring Judge, who has been the invisible and incorruptible witness of all their actions. These momentous truths are equally formidable and salutary to the lowest individual as to the most powerful, to the rich as to the poor, to the learned as to the ignorant, to the man involved in the management of public affairs, as to the recluse in his solitude ; they exercise their beneficial influence at every period of life in every country, over men as well as women. This doc-

trine of a just God, an all-wise Providence, a certainty of a future existence, and rewards or punishments is easily understood, and has always been so, more or less, by the universality of mankind. But it is from religion that these essential truths receive their sanction ; because at the same time that it leaves to reason the exercise of all its faculties, and to the moral principle ingrafted in our nature all its influence, it makes us besides consider the will of God as the foundation and sovereign rule of all our duties, the voice of our conscience as his voice, in its remorses the warning and prelude of his avenging justice, and in its good testimony the pledge of the future rewards reserved to the virtuous. Hence we are compelled to acknowledge, that no human views, no transitory advantages or losses, no temporal pleasures or miseries should divert us from listening to the inspirations or upbraidings of that interior witness and judge whom we carry in our bosom.

If the lessons which Jesus Christ has taught us in his passion were the invariable rule of the opinions, judgments, and conduct of the generality of men. If the sight of Jesus Christ crucified were habitually present to their mind, what a universal and wonderful change should we then descry in all conditions. The contemplation of his cross would maintain the great of the world in moderation, justice, benevolence, and modesty, and those of an obscure and low birth would be inspired with and kept in sentiments of submission and dependence. The rich would never make a wrong use of their riches, and the poor complain or murmur of their poverty. The unfortunate and distressed would never dare to find fault with the decrees of Providence, and those who enjoy the good things of this world would never forget the beneficent and divine Author of their prosperity. Revenge and treasons would be unknown.

Jealousy and ambition would not disturb the peace of societies and nations ; divisions and enmities would be banished from families. Envy and egotism would be extinguished ; uprightness, candour, probity, benevolence, and a reciprocal exchange of good offices would reign unmolested, and we should see revived among us the happy times of the apostles, when all Christians were but one heart and one soul. These few reflections will be sufficient, I hope, to show you that the mysteries of our holy religion have an intimate relation with, and sanction, enforce, and sweeten the practice of its moral precepts ; and, by a necessary consequence, the falsity of the boasted maxim that it is indifferent and even quite useless to occupy one's mind with religious dogmas. It seems to me that it has been clearly demonstrated that the belief in the sublimity and great utility, for the happiness of mankind, of the moral precepts of the Gospel, cannot be separated from the belief in its doctrine, and that they prove in an unanswerable manner its divine origin, and the authenticity of the revelation of our mysteries. For it has been observed with great propriety and wisdom, that it is quite impossible, and of course utterly incredible, that so sublime a moral legislation as that contained in the Gospel, could be united with false doctrines or dogmas ; that a lawgiver who has exhibited such a profound knowledge of all the secret springs which move the human heart, and of the most efficacious means to keep the passions of men under a proper restraint, inspire them with generous and noble sentiments, and thus promote and ensure their happiness, could ever have commanded them to believe things which had no existence, and taken delight in deceiving their mind, whilst at the same time he impressed their hearts with the most admirable principles of justice and every virtue. But vicious passions stifle the dic-

tates of an upright conscience, and these once stifled, the native rectitude of our reason is soon extinguished, or emits but an obscure, transitory, and faint light.

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## VI.

### THE ADVANTAGE TO BE DERIVED FROM READING THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS.

To the meditation of the awful truths of our holy religion, I shall advise you to add the reading of the lives of the saints. In this lecture so instructive, so highly interesting, not only to a Christian, but to every reflecting mind, you will find a great encouragement to the practice of virtue. When we read the Gospel and the works which have explained its maxims in their full extent and consequences, it is impossible not to be struck with admiration at their sublimity and beneficial tendency; and not to confess that if they were faithfully complied with, the society of men upon earth would bear a near resemblance with that of the blessed in heaven. It is worthy of remark that the infidels themselves who are so infatuated and blind as to deny that the moral precepts of Jesus Christ are stamped with the broad seal of divine authority, yet have never attempted to say that a code of laws contrary to them could ever be a code of good and salutary laws, and thus have been in spite of their desires compelled, at least indirectly, to acknowledge the wisdom and efficacy of his legislation. But entering into ourselves, reflecting upon our predominant propensities, the violence and tyranny of our passions, the clouds which so often obscure our understanding, and beholding all around us the vices and disorders which,

like an impetuous and irresistible torrent, seem to have overflowed the whole face of the earth ; a thought involuntarily occurs to the mind, Are men capable of attaining to such a perfection ? Is it not too much above our human and weak nature ? Do not the annals of the Church afford melancholy proofs, that men could not bear long this sublime perfection ? And in process of time, has it not been found necessary not to soar so high, and adopt a discipline not so exalted in theory, but more appropriate to our weakness ?

I shall first observe to you, that though at different times she has thought proper to make some alterations in her exterior discipline, yet the Catholic Church from the apostolic age down to our days, has never deviated in the least from the precepts of her divine Founder ; and that in her instructions, she teaches now the very same doctrine, and enjoins the practice of the same virtues which he taught himself, and commanded his apostles to preach to all the nations of the world. Secondly, I beg of you to consider the consequences of that distinction so easily admitted and so confidently repeated, as if it were an evident axiom, between what is fine and excellent in theory, and what is possible in practice. The rules or precepts of morality are false, if they be not practicable ; for all morality consists in practice, since it is only the science and knowledge of what we have to do or to avoid. One cannot, therefore, offer a greater affront to a lawgiver than to say that his laws are perfect, yet impracticable, since it is judging and accusing him as guilty of ignorance, imprudence, presumption, and vanity. No, the precepts of Jesus Christ are not impossible ; nay, even they *are not heavy*, as the beloved disciple said. When our most merciful Saviour promised to his Church to be with her to the end of the world, he assured her



thereby to grant to her children all the necessary graces to raise them above the weaknesses of our frail nature, and enable them to accomplish his commandments.

Now, an evident proof, as it is a matter of fact, which all the arguments and suggestions of our short-sighted reason cannot shake or weaken, is this : What has been practised during many centuries, and is still practised by many Christians even in our degenerate age, undoubtedly is practicable. Men can practise with the grace of God what has been by the assistance of the same divine grace practised by so many saints who were only men. Of this incontrovertible fact, history will furnish you with innumerable and unquestionable evidences. You will see that in all ages and under every clime, men had the same nature as ours ; that the saints, to become saints, had the same natural propensities to resist, the same passions to subdue, the same obstacles to encounter, the same temptations to overcome. Some were placed in more difficult circumstances than those in which we are, some in the very same. The spiritual lights which enlightened and guided their steps, we enjoy ; the graces which encouraged and supported them in the hardest trials, are at our disposal. Why should we not then make use of the same helps and assistance ? In vain shall we try to delude ourselves, reason alone will oblige us to confess, in the secret of our conscience, that it depends upon us to imitate the saints ; and we shall hear its voice strongly whispering to us, " Shall you not do what so many have done before you ? "

It is sometimes objected that the lives of the saints contain occurrences and rules of perfection very edifying, it is true, but which can only be interesting to, and fit for, people entirely sequestered from the world. This is a very great mistake, and a frivolous plea to palliate and excuse our tepidity, want of resolution, and the

secret fear which we feel to be led beyond the narrow and contracted limits of virtue, in which our excessive love of ease and rest, makes us to circumscribe our pious exertions. For, in the number of the saints proposed to our veneration, there are kings, queens, warriors, statesmen, magistrates, lawyers, poets, orators, philosophers, merchants, labourers, husbandmen, single and married women, widows, young and old people, tender virgins, and even infants ; therefore, in whatever condition divine Providence may have placed us, we shall find abundant matter of serious and useful reflections, and examples to imitate.

One does not reflect how much the profane, not to say the almost anti-christian education which youth receive at boarding-schools, and afterwards the opinions generally prevailing in the world, contribute to warp their judgment, and give them wrong ideas of what is truly great, beautiful, excellent, and worthy of investigation and praise. People who boast of their liberal education, and of the mental accomplishments that distinguish them from the vulgar world, would be ashamed to be unacquainted with the history of the most celebrated nations of antiquity. Those who aspire to the reputation of a more extensive learning, seek with a laborious and very unprofitable curiosity to remove the clouds in which their primitive annals are involved, and obtain some faint and always very uncertain notions on the existence and achievements of their founders. They glory and take a secret complacency, if they so far succeed as to discover certain particular facts, or minute and insignificant circumstances which had escaped the researches of former historians. All the fine arts conspire to transmit to posterity the names, the actions, the sayings, nay the countenance and features of the great men of Greece and pagan Rome. Yet, who were these renowned heroes ?

men of equivocal morals, and who, by their unbounded ambition, were the scourge of mankind. What does their history represent to us? If we except some very rare instances of humanity and pacific virtues, but continual and melancholy scenes of injustice, violence, treason, rapine, bloodshed, devastation, and ruin. In what did their love of liberty and patriotism consist? In an excessive love of their own country, incompatible with the prosperity and safety of the others. Jealous to fanaticism of their own independence, they exercised the most cruel tyranny over the conquered nations, and the unfortunate beings whom the chances of war or of their birth, or other circumstances, had delivered into their hands, and reduced to slavery.

The extravagant metamorphoses of the heathen gods, the fictitious and scandalous adventures of Jupiter, Juno, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Minerva, &c. &c., which present to the imagination but a picture of weakness, corruption, and of all sorts of vices, enter into the course of studies imposed upon youth, in order to qualify them to shine in the world. And the authentic and edifying history of those admirable men to whom we owe the knowledge of our religion, and the beneficial consequences which attended every where their preaching, are not deemed worthy of occupying a few moments of our leisure hours. Yet, shall we reap a greater advantage, or more solid pleasure from the relation of the conquests of Alexander or Cæsar, than from the account of the pacific triumphs of St. Peter and St. Paul, and their successors? If intrepidity, disinterestedness, generosity, fortitude, love of mankind be entitled to praise, and deserve to be proposed to our imitation, in what part of profane history shall we meet with such examples of these noble sentiments as in the lives of the saints. Burning with an ardent and invincible zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of

their fellow-creatures, they laboured with an indefatigable perseverance to raise altars to the true God, upon the ruin of the temples of those merciless divinities which could not be appeased and rendered propitious but by the sacrifice of human victims.

In order to accomplish their divine mission, forgetful of themselves, they abandoned their native land and all their friends to carry to the most distant nations the light of the Gospel, going about doing good, and diffusing among barbarians, civilization, humanity, and all the comforts of social life. Rather than to desist from their holy undertaking, they despised the most alluring offers, and suffered with an unabated courage, and patience, contempt, affronts, calumnies, unheard-of tortures, and death itself, under the most horrid and appalling shape.

And what cannot fail to increase your surprise and edification, besides these heroic acts of a lively faith and undaunted zeal, you will find in the lives of the saints a great many examples of milder and humbler virtues, but equally admirable, and no resemblance to which you will meet with in the history of the most celebrated personages of pagan antiquity. Among the saints you will see men, upon whom obedience and charity alone can prevail to accept of the most honourable functions, and dreading as one of the greatest dangers to which they were exposed, the temptation of drawing vanity from the veneration and devotedness of the people whom they were called to govern; and having no other support of their authority over them but their love and confidence. In order to obtain submission to their ordinances, and compliance with their advice, they had no recourse to seduction, exterior constraint, or arbitrary power. Persuasion alone, and the unaffected, but forcible language of sincerity and truth were the only means to which they resorted. It was by their sanctity, and in-

exhaustible benevolence, that they had gained the hearts, and reigned over them with a sweet, yet irresistible sway. It was not to acquire riches or any temporal advantages that they used their influence; it was only to convert sinners, reconcile those that were at variance, stifle enmities, entertain union and concord in families, obedience and loyalty to princes and magistrates. Equally regardless of threats or entreaties, they refused with an invincible fortitude to connive at any injustice, to approve or to wink at the least violation of the law of God or the principles of virtue; they are ready to die rather than to yield; but they did not know to resist by open force; they only prayed for their enemies and persecutors.

The lives of the saints will furnish you with perfect models of virtues which you would in vain seek elsewhere; courage without pride, humility without baseness, generosity without ostentation, zeal without bitterness and intolerance, chastity without self-complacency, prudence and discretion without deceit, cunning, or artifice, unrivalled talents with the simplicity and candour of children. You will see men without any other recommendation than the splendour of their sanctity, moving to pity, tears, and forgiveness, a haughty emperor in the paroxysm of anger and breathing revenge; stopping implacable conquerors in the midst of their victories, preserving whole populations and cities from devastation, ruin and slaughter; you will see them selling every thing which they possessed, reducing themselves to the utmost poverty, and even some selling themselves to ransom captives and restore to their families the unfortunate, who by the inroads of the barbarians had been torn from their native country, and were groaning under the most abject and cruel slavery. Among the Romans a crown was granted to him who had saved the life of a citizen. To how many crowns are not therefore

those saints entitled who by the exertions of their incomparable charity have preserved the lives of hundreds and thousands of their fellow-creatures ?

Among the saints you will find men and women in the bloom of life, loaded with honours, dignities, riches, and all sorts of enjoyments, disengaging themselves from them as from a troublesome incumbrance, embracing an obscure and laborious state of life, distributing their immense property to the poor, dedicating themselves to assist and serve them in their distress or infirmities, establishing asylums for the destitute, widows, orphans, and old people. To the charity of the saints we are indebted for the abolition of slavery in our Europe, and the cessation of the gladiators, and of the impure and sanguinary games of the amphitheatre. It is to saints that the most impartial and unquestionable witnesses attribute the preservation of works of ancient authors, the records of history, the revival of letters and learning, the introduction of milder laws in our codes. In short, since the first establishment of Christianity, all those whom we can with justice consider as the benefactors of mankind, were either saints or had been formed and guided by their instructions or examples.

We are far from wishing to depreciate and undervalue what is truly estimable and praiseworthy in the lives of ancient heroes. We admire the wisdom, transcendent talents and rare qualities, which some of them displayed in their public functions, and in their private and domestic concerns. The good they have done and their great actions deserved to be written in the pages of history, and offered to the admiration of subsequent ages. Nay, considering that they were deprived of a divine revelation, it is surprising that they had attained to such a high degree of perfection ; yet, one ought not to pass unnoticed the strange and

melancholy allay of vices and errors which we discover in their virtues. Cato, who was judged the most virtuous of the heathens, was rather addicted to drinking, and extremely harsh and severe towards his slaves. Titus himself, who was called *the delight of the human race*, did not scruple to deliver to wild beasts in the amphitheatre thousands of unfortunate Jews, on the anniversary day of the birth of his father Vespasian. Well, the name of Titus is familiar to the youngest student. But among those who have pretension to the knowledge of history, you will find very few, if any, who are acquainted with the name of the generous and bold solitary who left his obscure and peaceful retreat in the east, hastened to Rome, in order to put a stop to the cruel diversions of the amphitheatre, and was unmercifully butchered in the attempt by an intoxicated and infuriated multitude. Who has ever had the curiosity to inquire the number of Christians who, during nearly six hundred years, have been rescued from the cruel tyranny and dominion of the Mahometans by St. John of Matha, St. Peter Nolascus, and their humble and charitable disciples? Alas! dazzled by the transitory splendour of warlike achievements, or worldly accomplishments, and blinded by unaccountable prejudices, we extol to the skies those deeds which make a great noise, procure riches, power, and glory to some few individuals, though they bring disgrace, distress, and misery upon thousands of their fellow-creatures—whilst those humble, modest, and benevolent exertions which had no other end, no other effect but to reform the morals of men, and render them virtuous and happy, we disregard and do not wish nor care to know.—*O! vanas hominum mentes, O peccata cæca!*\*

\* Attila the Hunn, enriched with the plunder of many nations and cities, was marching against Rome. In the general consternation

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## VII.

## CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.

To the advice which I have given you to make now and then the lives of the saints a part of your pious lectures, you object that you have been told, not only

St. Leo, at the request of the whole city, went to meet him, in hopes of mollifying his rage, and averting the danger that threatened the country. . . . Contrary to the opinion of every one, he received the Pope with great honour, gave him a favourable audience; and through his suggestion, concluded a treaty of peace with the empire. . . . The same holy Pope went out another time to Genserie, the Arian Vandal king, and prevailed with him to restrain his troops from slaughter and burning, and to content himself with the plunder of the city (Rome). After the departure of the Vandals, St. Leo sent zealous Catholic priests with alms for the relief of the captives in Africa. . . . St. Ambrose, not content to lay out all the money he could raise, in redeeming captives, employed for that use the gold vessels belonging to the church, which he caused to be broken and melted down. . . . The same zealous and charitable bishop, before he granted to the Emperor Theodosius I. absolution for the crime which he had committed by ordering the massacre of Thessalonica, enjoined him to draw up a law to cancel all decrees that are made in haste or passion; and to command a respite of thirty days, before the execution of all warrants or sentences which regard life or the forfeiture of estates, that it may be discovered, if any surprise or passion had any part in it. This law the emperor forthwith commanded to be drawn, and signed it with his own hand, promising always to observe it.

Theodosius finding himself obliged to levy a new tax upon his subjects, on occasion of the war with Maximus, the populace of Antioch provoked at the demand, mutinied and discharged their rage on the emperor's statue, those of his father, his two sons, and his late consort, Flacilda, dragged them with ropes through the streets, and then broke them to pieces. But as soon as their fury was over, and they began to reflect on what they had been guilty of, and the natural consequences of their extravagances, they were all seized with such terror and consternation, that many abandoned the city; others absconded, and scarce



by Protestants, but even by Catholics who had the reputation of being men of learning, that in several lives of the saints, there are extraordinary actions, which clash with the usual rites of propriety and decorum,

any durst appear publicly in the streets. Flavian, notwithstanding his very advanced age, and though his sister was dying when he left her, set out without delay in a very severe season of the year, to implore the emperor's clemency in favour of his flock. His most eloquent and pathetic address to Theodosius had the desired effect, and full pardon was granted to the inhabitants of Antioch.

When the Vandals, the Sueves, &c. spread horrible ravages through Gaul, in order to come to the relief of the unhappy sufferers, St. Exuperius of Toulouse reduced himself to such poverty, having sold all which was of value, that he was forced to carry the blessed sacrament in an osier basket.

St. Martin of Tours went several times to Triers to intercede with Maximus, in favour of certain persons who were condemned to death for adhering to their late master, Gratian, and obtain the revocation of the order given by the tyrant, to search out the heretics that were in Spain, and deprive them of their lives and possessions.

St. Paulinus, after having granted their liberty to his numerous slaves, sold his immense property to relieve the poor. St. Serapion, surnamed the Sindonite, sold himself several times as a slave to different heathen masters, in order to have an opportunity to relieve the distresses of the poor with the money he got by thus disposing of his liberty.

In our own days during the dreadful disorder (the cholera morbus) which has desolated several countries of Europe the last two years, the present Archbishop of Paris, M. de Quelen, though his palace had been ransacked and levelled to the ground, a great part of his private property lost, and the yearly revenue of his see so much reduced as to be scarcely sufficient to provide for his personal wants ; not content to have daily exposed his life to administer the comforts of religion in the hospitals, crowded with sick and dying, has not hesitated to take upon himself the charge of maintaining and educating three hundred poor orphans, left without shelter and means of subsistence. Were I to quote all the examples of admirable charity, which the annals of the Catholic Church abundantly afford, this note would swell into a volume. Really, I cannot help thinking, that such, or similar incontrovertible historical facts, are as interesting as the account of the rape of Proserpine, and the cleansing of the stables of Augeas !!!

which a mind free from superstition cannot approve, and which no one could imitate without being justly exposed to blame, and sometimes to ridicule.

That there is a great exaggeration, prejudice, and misrepresentation in that severe censure, the following reflections will, I hope convince you.—1. The extraordinary paths in which the Holy Ghost is pleased sometimes to conduct certain privileged souls, are not proposed to all Christians indiscriminately as an invariable and obligatory rule which they are bound to follow. I candidly acknowledge, that some of them are rather to be admired than imitated. But if we are to enter into a serious and impartial discussion of the motives which prompted some particular saints to adopt an extraordinary manner of living; if we were to consider the circumstances in which they were placed, the age and the climate in which they lived, the usages and manners so widely different from ours, we shall be induced to own that the actions which, in our days, it would be imprudent, rash, or improper to attempt to imitate, were meritorious, and did much good in the times in which they were performed. 2. Those extraordinary things are not now, nor were they ever required as a necessary condition to obtain the salvation of our souls, nor even to attain to perfection. To no Christian it is commanded to shun all society, hide himself in the remotest deserts, as Paul the first hermit, or to practise the mortifications of St. Antony, Hilarion, Pacome, Macarius, or Simeon Stylites. But, because we are under no obligation of walking in their footsteps, are we thereby authorized to despise and condemn what Almighty God has inspired them to undertake, and his all powerful grace enabled to accomplish to the great edification of the faithful, and to the admiration as well as to the astonishment of the heathen themselves? 3. If we would sound the inmost recesses

of our heart, we should soon discover to our great shame, that our disbelief or censure of the extraordinary things related in the lives of some particular saints, proceeds not from conviction, but rather from a secret remorse of conscience for doing so little, while the saints did so much to secure the kingdom of heaven.

But you say, is there not a real or blameable exaggeration, and, you are almost ready to add, a downright lie in what I have read of some saints who, although they were perfect models of self-denial, humility, charity, and all Christian virtues, yet treated and spoke of themselves, as if they had been the refuse of mankind, and the greatest sinners, conjuring God with floods of tears to draw them out from the state of spiritual death in which they were buried, and restore them to that life of grace which they had lost by their manifold and daily transgressions. You ask me, cannot a man, who constantly does his best endeavours to accomplish all his duties towards God, his neighbour and himself, think and esteem himself, without pride, better than the man who is wholly bent to gratify his passions; who is violating openly the divine commandments, guilty of injustice, inhumanity, and those crimes which are amenable to the utmost severity of human laws?

With regard to moral precepts or counsels of perfection, exaggerated as well as relaxed principles are equally to be avoided, because equally inconsistent with truth, and dangerous in practice. The maxim expressed by this French verse, *rien n'est beau que le vrai, le vrai seul est aimable*, is still more applicable to rules of conduct than to those of poetry. Therefore a man who can in some degree bear testimony to himself that he has no other intention but to please God, and has for a long time endeavoured to regulate his life according to the principles of the Gospel, may, without presumption,

think that he is less guilty before the Sovereign Judge than those who openly abandon themselves to every sort of profligacy and crime. But I say that that exemption from heinous sins can never be so sure as to exclude every fear, and dispense us from distrusting ourselves, and continual vigilance. "I am not conscious to myself of any thing," said St. Paul; "yet I am not hereby justified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord."—1 Cor. iv. 4. Yet relying upon the mercy of Jesus Christ, who, by the application of his merits, will supply all that which will always be so greatly deficient in us, one may entertain some favourable judgment of one's dispositions, if not with a full certainty, at least with a reasonable confidence, which, though still attended with some doubts and apprehensions, is nevertheless sufficiently superior to them, to banish troubles and anxieties, and establish a most comfortable peace in the soul.

Moreover, those who have been favoured with such blessings ought to imprint deeply in their mind, that it is to the assistance of divine grace they owe them. That if they be guilty of fewer and lesser faults than others—if they have acquired greater merits—it is because they had received a greater abundance of spiritual graces, of which others were deprived. Education, instructions, pious connexions, good thoughts, the organization of the body, an innate propensity to, and a relish of, things which inspire with the love of virtue and hatred of vice, a particular delicacy of conscience, which keeps alive to and makes feel pain and remorse at every failure from duty, the precious advantage of being exempt from strong temptations, and of being remote from dangerous occasions which might seduce us into sin: such are the different natural causes which influence the conduct of men, and most efficaciously contribute to render them

virtuous. But all these means of salvation are so many gifts of God. Without them the most holy man might have been an obdurate sinner, and provided with them the same sinner might have attained to the highest perfection. Therefore, if we be so happy as to have reasonable motives to believe that we are working our salvation, or at least that we are doing all that is compatible with our weakness and frailty to secure it, let us be thoroughly persuaded that it is through the means just described, which we hold from the goodness of God, joined to a particular grace of his, we have obtained that happiness. Let us offer up to him every day heartfelt thanksgivings for his predilection in our regard, and be more and more animated with unfeigned sentiments of pity and compassion for those among our unfortunate brethren who, though they had abundantly all the spiritual helps requisite to save their souls, yet have not been so highly favoured, and pray most earnestly for their conversion.

As for those great saints who spoke of themselves with those strong expressions of humility, self-contempt, and abasement, which we have so much difficulty to reconcile with sincerity, let us reflect that we have within ourselves the principle and the source of all disorders, and that, since the fall of our first parents, we have a natural propensity to evil. "The imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth" (Gen. viii. 21); which caused St. Austin to say, that there is no sin, however grievous it may be, of which a man is guilty, which another man might not also commit, were he not guarded against it by the grace of God. "To will is present with me," said St. Paul, "but to accomplish that which is good I find not; for the good which I will I do not, but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . . I see another law in my mem-

bers fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? the grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. vii. 19, 23, 24, 25.

When God is pleased to preserve men from the baneful consequences of the corruption of our nature, he always grants them at the same time a clearer insight into his infinite and adorable perfections, a deeper sense of their unworthiness, and of the unbounded gratitude which they owe to him. The saints, therefore, being enlightened by the Holy Ghost, were penetrated with the truth of what the beloved disciple said : “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”—John i. 8. Beholding by the assistance of a heavenly light their duties, and weighing all their inward feelings as well as their exterior actions in the scales of the sanctuary, they could not help seeing that they had been gratuitously and unmeritedly preferred before many others ; knowing, besides, that the divine Searcher of hearts and reins appreciates the disposition of a soul not only by the number and characters of the sins which she commits, but also by the number and the extent of the graces bestowed upon her, at the remembrance of all the favours they had received, and at the consciousness of their still remaining imperfections and misery, it was impossible for them not to judge themselves more ungrateful and criminal than the greatest sinners ; and consequently they could say with sincerity, “O Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight no man living shall be justified.”—Ps. cxliii. 2. But that low opinion which they had of all that which they did, and the constant feeling of their interior miseries, which induced them to place themselves beneath the worst of their fellow-creatures,

did not make them fall into low spirits or despondency. They were persuaded that if they were miserable God was infinitely merciful; that he has our salvation at heart more ardently than we have ourselves; that he will never forsake us the first, but grant us his graces in due proportion with the earnestness and ardour of our desires, and the steadiness of our confidence in him. Therefore their hope was as immovable as their humility and self-distrust were profound and sincere.

The most learned and pious authors and divines among Catholics acknowledge, that from want of criticism, some few well-intentioned biographers have inserted now and then, in the lives of the saints which they published, miracles which were not always supported by contemporary documents and unquestionable evidences, and which were grounded only on popular reports and uncertain traditions. But never has the Catholic Church commanded to her children an implicit belief in these miracles. Every one is at full liberty to suspend his judgment, to examine them with sedulous attention, and refuse his acquiescence, if they appear to them destitute of solid proofs.

In the examination of the miracles attributed to the saints two excesses are equally to be avoided, the one of credulity, the other of criticism. There are pious and sincere Catholics, but rather of a weak or a scrupulous turn of mind, who are always afraid to make use of their reason, imagining that one of the characteristics of piety is to believe blindly all the marvellous things which they meet with in pious books. But in this they are much mistaken. True and solid piety consists in the love of truth, in maintaining unaltered the purity of religion, in an unreserved submission to the decisions of the Catholic Church, in a filial obedience and deference to the advice and ordinances of our lawful pastors, and in keeping,

with unwearied fidelity and perseverance, the commandments of God and of his church.

Others declaring themselves animated with an ardent zeal for the honour of the Catholic Church, but secretly influenced and biassed by pride and self-conceit, think that they cannot render her a more essential service, and give a more striking proof of their superior understanding, than by their not partaking what they call the devout credulity of the vulgar; and from these motives they reject as pious inventions, or as exaggerated accounts of popular reports, and without the least examination, the miracles recorded in the lives of the saints, though some are attested by eye-witnesses of unquestionable veracity, good sense, and probity, and consequently whom it is impossible to suspect of being deceived or willing to deceive others. Because miracles are out of the common course of things, or natural events, and they have not seen any performed before their own eyes, those over-delicate critics admit of no others as authentic, and worthy to be credited, but those mentioned in the Gospel, or the writings of the apostles; as if now the arm of God was shortened, and our Saviour could no longer accomplish the promise which he had made to his first disciples: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, he that believeth in me, the works I do he will also do, and greater than these he shall do."—John xiv. 12. An assertion, indeed, as extravagant as it is impious. You must therefore believe, because it is proved by incontrovertible testimonies, that since the apostolical times, down to our days, God has continued to work miracles in the Catholic Church, either for the general good of religion, or the particular advantage of individuals, according to the inscrutable designs of his allwise and always adorable providence upon mankind. But whether this or that miracle rest upon authentic evidences,



there is no harm nor sin to examine. Without wanting in the respect due to traditions, when extraordinary events are related, one may employ the rules of a moderate and wise criticism—without entertaining the least doubt of the omnipotence of God. Nay, sometimes it is necessary to have recourse to these rules in order not to attribute to him what he has not really done, and by too easy an admission of vague and doubtful reports as actual facts, to expose religion, and the most authentic miracles, to the cavils and calumnies of Protestants and pretended philosophers. But these critical investigations belong more properly to the ministers of the Church, or those who write *ex professo* on history or religious matters. As for the generality of Christians, without giving themselves the trouble of entering into arduous and scientific discussions, they may believe with simplicity what at first sight appears to them worthy of belief, and call in question, and even reject, what they judge doubtful or unauthentic. For the reality or the non-existence of those particular wonderful things is of little importance in itself, and adds nothing to, or diminishes nothing from, the divine authority of the Catholic Church. If St. Paul did not come to England, St. Andrew to Scotland, St. James to Spain, St. Magdalen and Lazarus to Provence, or if they actually announced the Gospel in those countries—if we be quite ignorant of the particular circumstances of the lives of St. George, St. Margaret, &c., or if the account of the wonderful and holy actions attributed to them is well or ill grounded, what does it signify? If our belief in such things be not supported by unquestionable arguments—will the authenticity of the Gospel be thereby weakened? Shall we be less obliged to believe the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity, and of the Incarnation? Shall we be dispensed from the duty of subduing our passions, deny-

ing ourselves, accomplishing the commandments of God, and tending to heaven? Universal traditions, respecting articles of faith, the administration of the sacraments, and practices of piety, ought to be received and adhered to with the utmost respect and obedience. But that deference and submission are not to be extended to all the observances which, through ignorance or credulity, may have crept in without the sanction of lawful authorities. With regard to such things and matters of fact, the maxim of St. Paul, "Prove all things: hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. v. 21), may be applied without fear.

It is natural to an inquisitive mind, and especially to women, to be desirous to know the minutest circumstances of the life of those eminent personages, whose names have been transmitted to posterity with a high reputation of virtue and sanctity. When kept within due bounds this desire cannot be called an idle curiosity; but when carried to an excess it has led to credulity, and has sometimes caused pious tales to be credited as real facts by good but uninformed people, who, rather than acknowledge with simplicity that the history of some renowned saints is very little known, prefer believing all that an ill-understood piety had, without sufficient proofs, committed to writing. Let us adore with profound respect the ways of Divine Providence, without indulging an improper and immoderate eagerness to be acquainted with things which God judged it unnecessary to be communicated to us. It is for the best reasons, without doubt, and most salutary purposes, that our Saviour himself wrote nothing, and his apostles so very little. Among the twelve, seven did not write one single word, and of some of them we know only the name. But what the Acts of the Apostles relate of St. Peter and St. Paul, is enough to enable us to form an idea of

the indefatigable labours, ardent zeal, sufferings, miracles, and success of the others ; since a few years after the death of Jesus Christ, the light of the Gospel had already penetrated to the remotest parts of the then known world. Were we to be acquainted with all the circumstances of the predication of St. Bartholomew and St. Thomas, as we are with several of the two fore-mentioned apostles, we should not be wiser, nor should we have more powerful motives to work out our salvation. Our curiosity alone would be much more gratified ; but we ought not to forget that it is one of those propensities of our corrupt nature which the Gospel teaches and commands us to mortify. In all disquisitions respecting religious subjects, let us always be guided by a sincere love of truth, and a spirit of impartiality, remembering “ that knowledge,” according to the remark of St. Paul, “ puffeth up, but charity edifieth.” If we endeavour, as we should do, to be of the number of “ the little ones” to whom God is pleased “ to reveal things which he hides from the wise and prudent,” let us be persuaded that he will never permit that we should commit any serious mistakes, and if we were, through inadvertency, to fall into any, they will not be of such a character as to endanger our salvation, or be an impediment to our advancement in virtue.

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## VIII.

### ON THE READING OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

I have no objection, madam, to your continuing to read the Bible ; but I beg of you to keep constantly present to your remembrance what you have with your

usual candour confessed to me to be indispensable, an infallible authority, in order to fix and unite all minds in the same explanation of this divine book ; for if we admit the free exercise of private judgment in interpreting the Holy Scriptures, instead of learning from their perusal humility and distrust of ourselves, they will entertain in us presumption, curiosity, an incessant itching about disputes and controversies, and a wide door will be opened to the most discordant doctrines, and contradictory and even extravagant opinions. There is, indeed, but one text, but there will be as many ways of explaining it, and, of course, as many religions, as readers. I own that this lesson of humility, this obligation in reading the holy writ, to submit your judgment to the explanations of the Church, will cause you again many a struggle, because Protestantism, in which you have been brought up, by establishing you the judge of the word of God, has taught you principles very seducing, and one may say, congenial to that pride which is so deeply ingrafted in our human nature. But believe me, you will never repent of this submission ; you will, on the contrary, feel more and more the truth of the words of Jesus Christ: "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your soul."—Matt. xii. 27.

All men, and especially the illiterate, which compose the immense majority of mankind, are in an absolute need, respecting the sense and the right understanding of the Holy Scriptures, of an infallible authority which decides for them, and thereby dispenses them from an examination and discussion of which they are utterly incapable. How is it possible that a labourer, a country woman, a sailor, a soldier, and the great number of other people who are engaged in the different and busy avocations of the world, in order to provide for themselves and

families a comfortable independency, and even the daily necessities of life, could find a sufficient time to examine the original text, to compare it with its various translations, and the numerous commentaries and explanations which have been published? And yet this is absolutely indispensable in order to regulate their faith and morals with a sort of security. How could they, many of them not knowing even to read, among the countless and contradictory interpretations which have been given of the same passage, distinguish which is the true one—which they are strictly bound to adopt and adhere to? Is it not, therefore, clear as noonday that such disquisition being out of their power it is not required of them? Would they have the presumption to say—It is true that I understand neither Hebrew, Latin, Greek, German, Italian, or French, and of course cannot know whether the translations of the Holy Scriptures in those languages are similar to or different from the English one, yet I take upon myself to decide that this is preferable before all the others; and although the Catholics, the Quakers, the Presbyterians, and all the other dissenters from the Established Church, do not agree with her, nor with one another, respecting the sense of the passages on which they ground their *different* articles of faith, I will reject all their interpretations, rely upon my private judgment, and make a creed of my own? Give me leave to ask you if you would not consider such a pretension as the height of the most senseless and scandalous pride. However, it is a necessary consequence of the Protestant principle, with regard to the reading of the Holy Scriptures, which entitles every man or woman, whatever their education may have been, to interpret them according to their own judgment and fancy. As for the learned themselves, and those who can dispose of their time as they please, they are as much, and

perhaps even more than the ignorant, in want to be guarded against presumption and self-conceit. By dint of reasoning, arguing, and discussing, they are liable to incessant doubts and perplexities: they exhaust all their abilities and learning in interminable disputes, and inventing new systems; and too often adopt and stick with an invincible obstinacy to the most absurd opinions. A supreme and infallible tribunal is therefore equally necessary for them, in order to remove their doubts, fix their uncertainties, put an end to their discussion, and make them agree in a common way of thinking.

The reading of the Holy Scriptures, when it is attended with a spirit of humility, steady faith, and unreserved deference and docility to the decisions or interpretations of the Church, cannot be too much recommended; and it is because the primitive Christians were animated with these holy dispositions, that their pastors exhorted them to read and meditate frequently the sacred writings. The constant attention of the ministers of the church to explain to their flock all the difficult passages, and the respect paid to their explanations, removed the dangers to which a private reading might have exposed the faithful; for, it must be confessed, that there are in the Psalms, the prophecies, the historical books, &c. &c., which compose the Bible, many things which the learned themselves cannot easily understand. The obscurity which we find in some parts of it, comes from the figurative and parabolic style prevailing in all oriental writers, used by the sacred penmen, our very imperfect knowledge of the history of the nations surrounding Judea, the striking difference of the manners and usages of the ancient times from those of our own age and country, and the sublimity of the divine truths and mysteries revealed to us in these sacred books. However, whatever be the cause, it is certain that one may say

without temerity of the Bible, what St. Peter said of the Epistles of St. Paul: "In all his epistles there are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction."—2 Pet. iii. 16.

The most wholesome food may become a deadly poison for an unsound and sickly stomach. The same may be said of the reading of the Holy Scriptures. The same divine word is, according to the dispositions of those who read or hear it, either a substantial food that nourishes the soul, or a two-edged sword which inflicts on it a mortal wound. It is "an odour of life unto life" to those who live by faith, and are truly humble and docile. The most intricate difficulties make no deep nor dangerous impression upon them, because they are conscious of the narrow limits of their understanding, and well know that when Almighty God is pleased to reveal some truths to his creatures, he may leave them still encompassed in some degree with mysterious veils, which we shall never be able to remove entirely as long as we remain upon earth, following with simplicity the rule given by St. Austin, they pass over without troubling themselves with painful researches, what they cannot easily comprehend. What is clear, perspicuous, and indisputable, they are edified at, turn it to their spiritual advantage, the correction of their defects, and their improvement in virtue. Trusting on the infallible promise of Jesus Christ, who said to his apostles, and in their person to all their lawful successors in the ministry, "who heareth you, heareth me," they listen with docility to the instructions of their pastors, submit to them their difficulties, and abide with confidence by their decision. Apprehensive of giving too great scope to our natural curiosity, they remain quiet and perfectly satisfied with that which they well know and understand; as for

those things which they are unable to explain, they are persuaded that it is their duty to refer them to the judgment and solution of those whom God has appointed to be their guides, and commanded them to obey. Distrusting themselves, they read only such parts of the Scriptures which their spiritual directors advise them, as best adapted to their wants, capacity, or circumstances ; and before they begin their reading, they never fail to address themselves to the sovereign Giver of all good gifts, in order to obtain of him the gift of understanding ; but it is also necessary to say that this same divine word is "an odour of death unto death" (2 Cor. ii. 16), to those who are destitute of the Spirit of God, and from the high and presumptuous opinion which they have of their great abilities are determined to believe nothing until having submitted it to the tribunal of their proud, though in reality so limited and weak reason. Thus seduced, either by their feelings, or the suggestions of self-love, and the secret influence of their passions, they will inevitably be deluded, and meet with death where they were to find life ; for God has so admirably blended light and darkness in the Holy Scriptures, and tempered the one by the other, that to the humble and docile they are an inexhaustible source of truth and consolation, whilst the proud and self-conceited draw out from them nothing but error, illusion, and too often, alas ! downright infidelity.

You tell me that you have been habituated to read the whole Bible from the book of Genesis to the Apocalypse, and you ask me leave to follow again this plan, although you confess with candour, that by adhering to it, because it was a task which you had imposed upon yourself, which you considered as a duty incumbent upon you to accomplish, you have been more than once tempted to lay the book aside, on account of the doubts which arose



in your mind, and the little or no profit you could derive from the perusal of things which you could scarcely understand, or from which you could not draw any instruction respecting your present or future situation in life. The purity of the motive which had induced you to stick strictly to this method, is without doubt praiseworthy; but certainly you were at liberty to select in the Bible the chapters which, having less difficulties, were more conducive to your improvement in virtue, and you might have left the others without the least fault or inconvenience.

St. Jerome, who was so zealous an advocate for the reading of the Holy Scriptures, in his letter to Læta, respecting the education of her granddaughter, recommended to her to put them into the hands of this young lady progressively, in proportion as she advanced in years, capacity, and virtue. He insisted that the Canticles of Canticles should be the last, for fear lest the expressions of the similitude made use of to represent the spiritual nuptials of the soul with the divine bridegroom should make a dangerous impression upon her young heart before she was solidly grounded in the simplicity of faith, and habituated to the language of piety. The Jews themselves, though accustomed to, and familiar with figures and metaphors, and better acquainted than we can be with the usages and the imagery style and manner of speaking of eastern nations, yet used precautions with regard to the reading of the holy writ. They did not allow to be read the first chapters of Genesis, some of Ezekiel, and the Song of Solomon, till the vigour of manhood. The reading of the Holy Scriptures is therefore commendable; and the faithful, who by their education and previous instructions are duly prepared for it, ought to be exhorted and encouraged to devote a part of their leisure hours to this pious and profitable

occupation; but the lecture of every book, or every chapter, is not to be indiscriminately advised to every one, and it would be a dangerous error to pretend that the reading of the Bible is absolutely necessary to know what we ought to believe and practise to work out our salvation.

St. Ireneus's sentiments in that regard were quite different from those of the Protestants. "If the apostles had not left us the Holy Scriptures, should we not be equally bound to follow and be guided by the traditions which they had intrusted to those, to whom they had committed the charge of the churches which they had founded. Many barbarous nations who have received the faith in Jesus Christ, have been guided by this rule, preserving without paper and ink the truths of salvation, written in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, keeping traditions with the utmost care, and believing through Jesus Christ the Son of God, in *one* God, creator of heaven and earth, and all that which exists therein. . . . Those men who embraced the faith without writings are barbarous if we consider their language; but with regard to doctrine, religious practices, morals, and faith, they are wise, perfect, and acceptable to God, living in justice, wisdom, and chastity. If any one speaking their native idiom, were to propose to them some heretical dogma, they would immediately shut up their ears, and run away with eagerness, not being able to bear hearing such blasphemous discourses. It is thus that supported and guarded by the old traditions coming from the apostles, they cannot in their admirable simplicity bear even in their thoughts the idea of such prodigies of error." From this extract of the writings of this learned doctor of the church, almost a contemporary with the apostles, one sees that in his time, among barbarians, there were multitudes of Christians who had

attained to a complete knowledge of the articles of our faith, and a high degree of spirituality and perfection; and who, as St. Paul says, "were made rich in Jesus Christ, in all utterance and in all knowledge" (1 Cor. i. 5), though they had never read the sacred writings.

You must not conclude from this observation that I wish to deter you from reading the Holy Scriptures, and choosing in them subjects of meditation. My only intention in quoting the passage of St. Ireneus, was to give you an evident proof that tradition, and the instructions of the pastors, are as sufficient to make good Christians now, as in the first ages of Christianity. The Catholic Church, from which we hold the Holy Scriptures, gave by her living word to the primitive faithful, the very same instructions which we could receive from the perusal of the sacred text; for it is reading it, to hear the ministers of the church, whose duty is to preach and explain the doctrine and moral precepts contained in it, and to appropriate their explanations to the capacity, wants, and circumstances of their respective flocks. St. Austin thinks precisely as St. Ireneus, and says, that a man animated with faith, hope, and charity, and guided by the decisions of his pastors, is in no need of the Holy Scriptures, unless he has the charge of teaching others. I shall not enlarge myself any more upon the subject, though I could add many other testimonies, solid arguments, and examples in confirmation of what I have just said, because I am not writing upon controversy; but I thought that it might be useful to you, to lay before you these few observations, as you meet daily with people, who being zealous promoters of Bible societies, imagine that the most efficacious means to support and advance the cause of religion, is to distribute the Bible, without explanations or commentaries, among every description of men, women, and even children, though most of them

are unable, on account of their want of education and laborious occupations, to dedicate a sufficient time to a reading which requires a serious attention to understand its meaning. The advantage which can be reaped from the reading the Holy Scriptures depends entirely on the previous and proper disposition of the heart. He, says St. Austin, whose heart is full of charity, will easily understand, and draw spiritual benefits from the sublime doctrine contained in the sacred writings; but as this disposition is unfortunately very rare among the generality of the readers, it happens that very few are disposed to read it with fruit. For what has been the result of the liberty left to each individual to form his faith and regulate his morals on the Bible, interpreted according to his limited reason, or the dreams of a wild imagination, but the rising of new sects on all sides, and that a spirit of indifferentism, bordering upon infidelity, is insinuating itself under the fair and specious name of liberality and tolerance into all classes of society, gradually undermining all the principles of sound morality, and substituting in their place a vile and narrow spirit of egotism.

As for you, madam, and all pious Catholics, whose only aim is not to criticise, discuss, or indulge an idle curiosity, but to be edified, and who would rather die than entertain any opinion contrary to the decisions of the Church, and the explanations of her ministers; the reading of the Holy Scriptures, especially of the Gospel, the Epistles of the Apostles, and some particular parts of the Old Testament is very advisable, and it will be their support and help through the various trials inseparable from our state of probation, and they will find in this lecture what is expressed in the books of Maccabees: "We needed nothing," said these holy and courageous men, "having for our comfort the holy books

that are in our hands." But, beware not to take at random the first passage which may strike your eyes at your opening the sacred book for the subject of your meditation. It would be tempting God; for, although "all Scripture inspired of God is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice (2 Tim. iii. 14), all the different parts of it are not equally destined or appropriated to give us direct and immediate instructions, nor proportioned to the capacity or spiritual wants of every reader. Choose, therefore, such chapters which are more chiefly adapted to your actual circumstances, more proper to encourage you in the correction of the defects which are still predominant in you, and inspire you with a greater confidence in God, humility, and a permanent fidelity in the accomplishment of all your duties, either spiritual or temporal.

You tell me that notwithstanding your full conviction that there is nothing in the Holy Scriptures which, if well explained, could appear inconsistent with truth and the soundest principles of reason and morality, yet you cannot at times help being startled, and almost tempted to blame the manner in which the sacred penmen have expressed themselves. For instance, it seems to you very strange, that in the punishment of the wicked they represent God as sometimes actuated by human passions, by revenge, anger, and taking a sort of pleasure in their sufferings, "blinding their eyes, and hardening their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart and be converted."—Joel xii. 40. You are always at a loss how to reconcile with the principles of charity and forgiveness of injuries, the rancour and bitterness with which David, in the Psalms, speaks of his enemies, as if he were most ardently wishing them doomed to the most severe calami-

ties, and even to destruction. Some few observations will remove these apparent difficulties.

The word *wrath*, when applied to God, means only his unerring justice, which makes him punish the crimes of the wicked. It is not in him a violent passion which, as in man, agitates and disturbs the soul, says St. Austin, but a sovereign perfection which the Holy Scriptures mark out by these expressions, when alluding to the wrath of God in punishing the crimes of men, they say, "O Lord God Almighty, thou judgest with tranquillity and justice."

In our language vengeance is a word which has two meanings, and all the difficulties come from a wrong sense in which it is taken when applied to God. It means either a violent emotion and rancour with which the man who thinks himself injured is animated, and which prompt and excite him to afflict, vex, and torment his enemy as much as he can, or a just and lawful reparation, or an equitable punishment of injustice and crimes.

Vengeance, understood in the first sense, is a passion as criminal in its principle, as baneful in its consequences. When once it has taken possession of a man's heart, reason and religion have no longer any influence upon him. All sentiments of humanity are stifled; exasperated by the real or supposed injury he imagines to have received, the most sacred rights of justice and nature he tramples under foot; a blind rage obscures his understanding, and hurries him on to commit the most unwarrantable and cruel actions, and if he be so unfortunate as to succeed and overpower his enemy, he takes a hellish pleasure in the sufferings and destruction he has brought upon him. To attribute to the Supreme Being, whose goodness and mercy are above all his other infi-

nite perfections, such horrid dispositions, would be a blasphemy. But vengeance, understood in the second sense, viz., as a just reparation of injustice, and a punishment of crimes, has been deemed by the wisest law-givers as a most necessary virtue, and the exercise of it they have forcibly recommended as indispensable amends and atonements due to society for the violation of the laws, and a most powerful restraint against the commission of crimes. When magistrates inflict punishments, it is from a sense of duty, without any feeling of hatred or resentment against the guilty, even with an inward compassion for what they have to suffer; their apparently-inexorable severity has no other motive but to preserve to the laws their authority, protect the good from the violence of the wicked, prevent justice from falling into derision or contempt, and maintain peace and harmony among men. It is in this sense that St. Paul says, "princes are God's ministers, avengers to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."—Rom. xiii. 5. Therefore, with reference to God, vengeance is always to be understood as the exercise of his justice. A stranger to the passions of men, when he is represented as threatening the violators of his commandments with the severity of his vengeance, it signifies only that his sanctity does not permit him to leave them unpunished; for he knows that men would never believe that there is a crime where they see no penalty. But in the infliction of punishments, he always acts without passion, and according to the unerring rules of his eternal and infinite wisdom and mercy. Let us keep constantly present to our minds, that God's infinite happiness cannot receive the least increase or suffer the least diminution from the conduct of men; consequently that he cannot be delighted, as their corrupt propensities incline them to be towards their enemies, in ren-

dering evil for evil, and we shall never be scandalized at the metaphorical expressions which we meet with in the Holy Scriptures.

We are most positively assured, both in the Old and New Testament, "that God has commanded no man to do wickedly, and he has given no man licence to sin."—Ecclus. xv. 21. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."—Ez. xxxiii. 11. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unjust man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, . . . for he is bountiful to forgive."—Is. lv. 7. "Of the wicked it is also said, that their own malice blinded them."—Wisd. ii. 21. "The Lord dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance."—2 Pet. iii. 9. Our Saviour himself, speaking to the pharisees, said to them, "If you were blind you should not have sin." John ix. 41. Therefore as God cannot contradict himself, it is evident, that from the following passage in the Gospel according to St. John, that he (God) "hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts and be converted, and I should heal them."—John xii. 40. We ought not to infer that God is the author of sin, or that he hardens the heart of the wicked. The meaning of these expressions is only, "that their heart is grown gross, and with their ears they have been dull of hearing, and their eyes they have shut;" as we read in St. Matthew xv. 14; and that in punishment of the wicked having so long shut their eyes against his divine light, he offers it no more to them, and abandons them to their blindness and to the tyranny of their unruly passions. Hence, it is to their wilful resistance to the cries of their conscience and the reiterated inspirations



of grace, and their obstinacy in wickedness, and not to the will of God, that their loss and punishment are to be attributed.

As for the imprecations or curses which we read of in the Psalms of David against his enemies, they are not a prayer addressed to God by this holy king, in order to draw down upon them calamities and sufferings; they are merely a prediction of the punishment which awaits them if they be not converted from their evil ways. Hence, when the church preserves in her liturgies and prayers the expressions of the Psalms or the prophets those expressions which seem to imply a spirit of irritation, resentment, and uncharitableness, she applies in a spiritual manner what the holy penmen said of the enemies of the people of God. Yet she has not the remotest intention to curse or wish them any misfortune; her motive is to give them a timely warning of their dangerous situation, and by employing the most strong language to awake them to a lively sense of the eternal misery reserved for them in a future life, and thus determine them to break off their criminal habits, and be sincerely converted, which is the constant object of her most ardent prayers.

It is no sin to wish and pray that the wicked should be stopped in their profligate and impious pursuits, and meet in this life such disappointments and misfortunes as would compel them to enter into themselves. Such prayers and wishes having no other object but their real happiness and salvation. An evident proof that the prayers of this description, which we so often meet with in the Psalms, were dictated by the purest motives, and entirely divested of personal, selfish, and revengeful views, is that the royal prophet has always recourse to God to defend his cause, and to him alone commits the care of his vengeance. Men animated and

goaded by a spirit of animosity and resentment act in a very different manner. They do not supplicate the father of mercies, whom they know willeth not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live, to lend them the assistance of his almighty power against those whom they hate; and in order to gratify their revengeful feelings, to strike them with his thunder. To themselves alone, or those who partake in their criminal projects they apply, and on their concurrence they rely.

Moreover, if the prophet had, as it is generally believed by the most learned and pious commentators, in these passages, the spiritual enemies of our salvation in mind, his curses and imprecations ought to be understood in their full extent. A corrupt world, inordinate passions, and the powers of hell, are enemies, whose ruin and destruction we are authorized, nay, even commanded to wish and pray for; because they are not susceptible of a happy change, and are incapable of ever doing any good. They have been condemned by Jesus Christ, and there is no case, no circumstance, in which we may come to terms, compromise, or agree with them. To these well-grounded and unquestionable observations St. Chrysostome adds, that the Jews were a stiffnecked people, who would have never been sufficiently sensible of the nature of God's justice, and his hatred of sin, if these essential attributes had not been represented to them under the most striking figures and emphatic expressions.

As for us who are enjoying the precious advantage of the Gospel-revelation, and thoroughly convinced that the infinite perfections of the Deity are incompatible with human passions, and consequently with wrath, revenge, resentment, &c. &c., we must always take these words, when applied to God, in a figurative sense, and reject every interpretation which would be in the least

derogatory to the pure and right notions we are obliged to entertain of his goodness, mercy, and justice. To magistrates alone, acting in the name of the state, and in cases in which they are not personally concerned, it belongs to judge, condemn, and punish delinquencies and crimes against the laws. But, according to the principles of eternal justice, to them, in their private character, as well as to the other members of society, to forgive injuries, to return good for evil, is always of strict obligation, that they may be the children of him "who makes his sun shine upon the good and the wicked, and raineth upon the just and the unjust."—Matt. v. 45.

The holy fathers remark with great propriety that it would be dangerous to take in a strictly literal sense most of the parables mentioned in the sacred writings. To draw consequences and rules of conduct from all the parts of the allegory, would be exposing oneself to fall into great errors; it is the chief and direct object of the parable, which ought to be considered, because it is that which in making use of it the divine Teacher had in view: for instance, in the parable of the unjust steward, Jesus Christ represents to us a man who was already convicted of a breach of honesty, by "having wasted the goods of his master;" and who, to provide himself with means of subsistence after his discharge, commits another and still greater injustice and infidelity. What was the intention of our Saviour? Was it to propose the dishonesty of this steward as a model to imitate? No, assuredly; by calling him an unjust steward, he takes care to guard us against that false interpretation which might be given to his words; his end, as he positively declares it, is to compare the eagerness, sagacity, and zeal "of the children of this world," to promote and preserve their temporal concerns, with the indifference and carelessness "of the children of light" respecting

their eternal interests and their salvation. It is not the dishonest and criminal means which the unjust steward employs which are commended, it is his solicitude to secure to himself friends for the time of need, and which we ought to imitate in order to be provided for the daily and future spiritual wants of our souls. The previous knowledge of these principles is absolutely necessary to read the Holy Scriptures without inconvenience. And having observed in our conversations, and some of your letters that your mind is not unfrequently disturbed by the forementioned difficulties, I thought that these reflections would tranquilize you, were you to be troubled again with anxious thoughts on the subject.

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## IX.

### ON BOOKS OF PIETY AND MEDITATION.

With regard to books of piety, or treatises upon spirituality, "let the love of pure truth lead you to read."—Im. of Ch. Do not follow the example of those devout people who are always hankering after all new publications on subjects of piety. In order to improve in virtue it is not necessary to read many pious books, but to read well and over again some few good ones. Confine yourself to a small number, among which the *Imitation of Christianity* is always to hold the first place. The more frequently you read it, the more you will like it. Do not let one single day pass without reading at least a few sentences of this admirable book, which is the best work that ever was composed by men, since the Gospel has been dictated by the Holy Ghost, said

a philosopher of the last century ; there is in its different chapters a hidden manna suited to every taste. St. Francis of Sales's *Introduction to a Devout Life*, his *Letters* ; Rodriquez *On Christian Perfection* ; *The Spiritual Combat* ; Fenelon's *Spiritual Works* ; Bossuet's *Elevations and Meditations on the Gospel* ; Bourdaloue's *Sermons and Thoughts* ; *L'Ame Elévée à Dieu* ; *Traité de la Paix Intérieure* ; Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, I should recommend to you, without however excluding other pious books which you may relish, and from which you find that you derive some spiritual benefit. Your pious lectures I advise you to make short and long : *short* by the number of pages you read, *long* by reading slowly and attentively, in order to be penetrated with the truths which are the subject of your lectures.

Do not overload your mind with many various thoughts, try gently to fix your attention upon a particular subject, do not leave it for another as long as it nourishes your soul ; thus, each truth upon which you meditate will sink more deeply into your heart. Otherwise you will soon forget what you have read, and of course you will reap no benefit from it. It is not rare to meet with well-disposed people, who having heard and read that spiritual readings must enter into the plan of a devout life, are attentive to dedicate some of their leisure moments to that pious exercise. But this done, they are perfectly satisfied, and imagine, that without incurring the guilt of hypocrisy or presumption, they may bear to themselves the comfortable testimony that they are animated with sincere piety. But indeed it would be a very great illusion, if from their reading they derived no other fruit, but only to be able to say that they have read some spiritual book for such a length of time. At the end of our lecture we should have it in our power to say, such thing I have

learned and it will serve to direct my judgment and conduct in such or such circumstance.

When a maxim or a reflection strikes you, do with it as you would do with a sweet lozenge: you would keep it in your mouth till melted; let that maxim be kept in your mind till it has gently distilled into your soul. Do not pass to another consideration, till you feel inwardly that the first has been, as it were, changed into your substance. It is unquestionable that it is a thousand times preferable to read a few lines according to this method than many pages with hurry and in a superficial manner. Thus you will habituate yourself to read with calm and composure, and your reading will be a real and solid meditation. Avoid mere speculative considerations; all that which you read or meditate upon, must tend to practice. When you open a pious book, remember that through its medium it is Jesus Christ who is going to speak to you, and on the most important concern of your life. Say to him as the young Samuel: "Speak, O Lord, thy servant heareth." "I am thy servant, give me understanding that I may know thy testimonies."—Psalm cxviii. Impose as much as it is possible the strictest silence on your natural desires, propensities, aversions, prejudices, and habits, to listen to him who is "the Word and the Truth which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world."—John i. 9. Examine with care the influence which your reading should have on your conduct; beseech our Saviour to engrave in your heart the truths which have been manifested to you. If they make you discover some defects of which you were not aware, offer him your most grateful thanks for having thus given you the means to correct yourself. Put down in writing what has made the deepest impression upon you, that looking at it in the course of the day, the sentiments with which you were

animated during your lecture, may be revived and last. Always finish it by a short prayer, praying to God to accomplish with fidelity what he was pleased to teach you in your pious exercise.

Rest upon the bosom of God with peace, as a babe in the arms of its mother. Reflect with simplicity on the subject which you have selected for your meditation. Entertain your mind with the considerations most proper to move you to compunction, and fill your heart with love. Shun all those violent efforts which affect the head; they come more from a lively imagination than from a pure and unfeigned resolution to be in all things conformable to the will of God. Prayer or meditation is of all the exercises of piety that which requires a greater liberty and peace. It should always be free from a strong, close and painful application of the mind. I willingly adopt the maxim of spiritual writers, that a meditation which gives a headache is not properly made.

Avoid all far-fetched reflections, deep and subtle reasonings, or extraordinary feelings. Do not attempt to soar too high, lest you should be lost in the clouds. Be satisfied with considerations which you easily understand; let them be plain, familiar, short, coming from the heart. What is truly essential is not to know many things, but to love much. Those who pass too rapidly from one truth to another, will succeed only to gratify their curiosity. By embracing successively so many things they grow dissipated and retain nothing. When you feel an extreme difficulty to elicit some formal acts of devotion, do not exhaust your strength in order to excite them in you. Provided you often repeat either orally or inwardly, the acts of faith, hope, charity, and contrition, and be sincerely and firmly resolved to do in all things the will of God, remain quiet God is

jealous of the uprightness and possession of our heart ; but when he sees us in this holy disposition he is indulgent and condescending for all the rest. Banish all melancholy thoughts and reflections upon your want of feelings ; trust in his infinite mercy ; for there is no friend upon earth that carries his friendship and tenderness for us as our divine Saviour does in our regard.

Be careful to choose beforehand a subject of meditation proper to prevent the wanderings of the imagination, and fix your mind, still little accustomed to be collected, for a certain time in the presence of God ; beg of him to grant you affections which will attach you firmly to him, because it is by the sentiments which he impresses in our hearts that he draws us to him. Unfold to him the inmost recesses of your soul, as a little child tells its mother with simplicity and candour all its pains and pleasures. If you enjoy the sweetness of his presence, and feel the attractions of his love, tell him that you are delighted to love him, penetrated with gratitude, and confounded at his infinite goodness and mercy in accepting the homage of a heart so weak, so miserable as yours. As long as this sensible fervour lasts, time will pass rapidly away, your heart will speak out of its abundance, you have nothing else to do but to yield to its pious feelings. But you ask me, When I am cold, dry, disgusted of every thing, what shall I do ? You will say all that which you feel. You will tell God that his love is departed from you, that you are deprived of every virtuous sentiment ; tired to be in his presence, and that it seems to you that you cannot be at ease but at a great distance from him, at liberty to follow your natural inclinations, and give yourself up to the most frivolous and vain amusements. In short, tell him without reserve all the evil which you discover in your soul. Alas ! if we lay at the sacred feet of our



Lord our manifold miseries, we shall have but too ample a matter of conversation with him ! When two friends well assured of a reciprocal friendship, are together, they speak as they think and feel with unlimited liberty ; the heart of the one pours itself forth into the heart of the other. Their two souls are knit together, as the Scripture says of David and Jonathan ; or rather they are but one heart and one soul, animated by the same sentiments. O happy, infinitely happy, the souls that by their fidelity to and correspondence with grace, have deserved to be in this friendly, familiar, intimate, and unreserved society with God. For he alone is the true, the bosom friend by whom we are in no danger of being forsaken, and who will always give the salutary advice and consolation we may stand in need of To him, therefore, let us always have recourse. When happy, let us beg of him to teach us to enjoy our happiness with moderation and refer it to him. When under afflictions to bear them with patience and resignation to his adorable will ; in our troubles, difficulties, and temptations, to grant us the grace necessary to overcome them, and persevere faithfully in his service. To the melancholy recital of all our wants and miseries we must add the most fervent prayers : O my most merciful Saviour, ought each of us to say, thou beholdest my weakness, inconstancy, ingratitude, and innumerable infidelities, hasten to come to my assistance ; draw my heart to thee, and if thou art pleased to grant me this unspeakable favour, do, I beseech thee, keep it in thy hands, for if left to me it will soon escape me ; give me all that which thou knowest is more capable to encourage me to carry thy sweet yoke with cheerfulness and zeal. I dare not ask thee crosses or consolations, I abandon myself blindfolded to the inscrutable designs of thy providence, I adore them all without seeking to know them before-

hand, let thy will be done in me now and for ever and ever. Have mercy on me, not according to my contracted, narrow, and selfish desires, but according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. Thus, in your meditations and the inward intercourse of your soul with God, always speak to him either of his goodness or your miseries, it is an inexhaustible source of the most useful reflections under trials as well as in the enjoyment of spiritual comforts.

Accustom yourself to seek God within you; it is there that you will find his kingdom: "Lo, the kingdom of God is within you."—Luke xvii. 21. We too often seek him far from us by subtle reasonings. We are too desirous to enjoy the sweets of virtue, and too apt to indulge the inventions of a warm imagination, without reflecting that the essential characters of solid piety consist in submitting our reason to faith, and our will to that of God. Always speak to him with simplicity, openly from the plenitude of the heart: though we may have lived at a great distance from him, we ought not to be afraid to return to him and approach him with the respectful liberty and confidence of filial love. The only previous preparation necessary, is a deep sense of our wretchedness, a hearty sorrow of our sins, and an unbounded reliance on his paternal goodness. He loves the little ones, with them he delights to converse, to them he communicates himself with the effusion of his choicest graces. Meditation is the exercise of love; and love hides nothing from the beloved. All is included, when we can with sincerity assure him, that we love him, and ardently wish to love him more and more. Love, says St. Austin, is the worship which we owe to God, and the only one acceptable to him, *non nisi amando colitur*. But it is not enough to lay before him all your desires and wants; you must besides be careful,

by a faithful correspondence to his sweet inspirations, and an entire abandonment of yourself to his unspeakable goodness, to dispose your heart to receive the impressions of his grace. Do not trust with presumption on your own strength, and good resolutions, nor even upon the most diligent precautions, although you must take them with unabated exactitude and vigilance, and as if your perseverance depended on yourself alone. Our safety for the present as well as for the future rests upon the protection and mercy of God who has loved us from all eternity, and still continues to pursue us by his love, notwithstanding our indifference, ingratitude, and daily offences. In him alone, therefore, you must put your reliance and hopes:—oh! how many holy instructions will you receive, if you listen to him with attention; he will suggest and teach you all truth. But we are so full of our thoughts, so much prepossessed with our own imaginations, that we seldom hear his voice. We should be silent within, in order to be in the disposition described by the royal prophet, “I will hear what the Lord will speak in me.”—Ps. lxxxiv. 9. The silence of the tongue every one knows, but the silence of the heart, very few understand. Were we to keep our senses under proper restraint, and our soul free from the influence of our passions, mental prayer, like a reviving and beneficial dew, would insinuate itself into, and animate all the actions of the day; it would procure an intimate presence of God, it would on every occasion renew our strength, and regulate the exterior as well as the interior. In the whole tenour of our conduct, we should be then guided by the Spirit of God. We should no longer give way to the vivacity of our temper, nor to the eagerness and vexations of self-love. Steadiness and constancy in purposes would be divested of obstinacy, pride, or rashness and condescension and compliance from weak-

ness, pusillanimity, or human respect. Every sort of excess, indiscretion, singularity, affectation, would be avoided. We should do the same honest things which we are accustomed to do, but much better, without selfish views, and with the inward and consoling testimony that we are doing them for God.

To meditation or mental prayer apply what our divine Saviour says of vocal prayer: "When you are praying, speak not much as the heathens; for they think that in their much speaking they may be heard."—Matt. vi. 7. To make a good meditation, it is not necessary to compose fine speeches, and to hold long discourses. When we meet with a friend whom we are delighted to see, we often do not speak much to him, but we are overjoyed to be in his company, we look at him with sweet complacency, yet we say but little, but this little comes from the heart. We do not strive to speak with eloquence or great accuracy of language, we repeat the same words without thinking, because the same sentiments continue to predominate. In short, it is not diversity of thoughts, but the correspondence and the repose of the heart which we are seeking after in the society of a friend: it is thus we should be with God, who through his unspeakable love and incomprehensible condescension, vouchsafes to be our most tender, cordial, sincere, and intimate friend.

When we meditate, we may with advantage make use of short and sensible reasonings, in order to bring a stronger conviction into our mind, and enable us to take proper measures to put our resolutions in practice: but with regard to God, a single word, a thought, a sigh, a desire, says every thing. Transports, ecstasies, sensible devotion, tender feelings are not requisite; a sincere good will, though dry, and destitute of sensibility, is more pure, and oftentimes more acceptable to him. In

fine, we should be content with offering to him what himself is willing to give, a heart inflamed with the fire of divine love when he is pleased to kindle it; and a steady, resolute, and faithful will, when he thinks proper to deprive us of inward sweetness and sensible fervour. I call a sincere and faithful will, the fixed and unshaken resolution, not to mix with the love of God, any voluntary affections which might alter its purity, and a perfect conformity to his adorable will in all circumstances, either comfortable or painful. This conformity and abandonment to his inscrutable designs, are unequivocal proofs of a solid conversion and enlightened piety. As for sweetness of devotion, and sensible sorrow for sins; when favoured with these precious gifts, heartfelt thanksgiving must be returned to God for this unmerited favour, and under aridities and insensibility, we must humble ourselves without using violent and almost always vain efforts to get out from this painful trial, considering God in all, and continuing to perform our duties with fidelity.

It does not depend upon us to have tender feelings, but with the assistance of God's grace it is always in our power to have a good will; therefore at all times, in every circumstance, pray earnestly to God to grant it you, and leave to his wisdom to give you either the milk of inward consolations to support your weakness, and if I may say so, your childhood in a spiritual life, or to wean you from these sweetnesses in order to humble, fortify, and render you able to undergo the trying exercises of a pure faith, by making you eat, "in the sweat of your face" (Gen. iii. 19), the bread of the strong; were you to love God and keep his commandments only when he favours you with the sweetness of his blessings; then it would be loving these blessings and not him. When we serve God from a sense of duty

without the help of sensible devotion, our fidelity is much more meritorious although it may appear to us that we are less zealous and fervent. In the plenty and enjoyments of the summer the provident husbandman is careful to gather up provisions against the wants and privations of the winter. With regard to your spiritual exercises act with the same prudence, employ the same precautions ; prepare yourself in the full enjoyment of comforts for the time when they will be withdrawn from you, for were you fondly to rely on their continual support, their loss would be the cause of great distress, and perhaps of a dangerous and mortal fall.

I earnestly wish that Almighty God may be pleased to enlarge your heart, and make you always run with alacrity and cheerfulness "the way of his commandments."—Psalm cxviii. 32. For, as the *Imitation of Christ* says, "he rides at ease that is carried by the grace of God." But, as we read in the same admirable book, "never was found any one so religious and so devout as not to have sometimes a subtraction of grace, or to feel a diminution of devotion ; and no one was ever so highly favoured, wrapped, and illuminated as not to be tempted at first or at last." I thought necessary to guard you against the discouragement sometimes resulting from those alternatives of aridities and comforts in the accomplishment of religious duties. The pious Christians who have little or no experience in the ways of God, attaching too great an importance to spiritual consolations, are inclined to use the utmost exertions to obtain them, or recover them when they are deprived of their help. Thus, without being aware of the consequence, they exhaust their strength, and sometimes dry up the source of solid sentiments of piety ; because these laborious efforts tend to inspire them with a dangerous confidence in themselves, as if it were entirely

in their power to move their hearts as they please, and thus expose them to many sad and unforeseen disappointments. Therefore, if God give you spiritual comforts in your meditations, "be not overjoyed, nor vainly presume that they will never pass; for this hour will soon pass away, and temptation will follow. When comfort shall be taken away from thee, do not presently despair, but wait with humility and patience for the heavenly visit; for God is able to restore thee a greater consolation."—Im. of Christ. Whilst all the affections of our heart are sincerely tending to God, the impression of sensible objects may now and then deaden and abate in some degree the active operations of our soul, but it cannot prevent the efficacy of this pious tendency. Death alone, which will break off all our corporal ties, will set us up in the full liberty of seeing and loving; till the day of that happy deliverance we must expect to feel the effects of our terrestrial frame. In the mean while we must endeavour to silence our passions, stop the wanderings of our imagination, and keep our senses under due control; and all that which can contribute to this desirable end we must have recourse to, because it procures recollection and greater facility to occupy our minds with supernatural considerations.

When I speak of supernatural considerations, I do not allude to the extraordinary prayer and communications with which God has favoured some saints. I say only that when the soul is disengaged from the impression of external objects, and free from the influence of the imagination, an ordinary grace, without the interference of a miraculous agency may be sufficient to procure her an intimate union with God, and a great knowledge of the mysteries of our holy religion. The particular characters of mental prayer, the raptures and ecstasies recorded in the lives of St. Theresa, Bridget, &c., and in the

writings of ascetic authors, do not despise and reject as the illusions of a heated imagination; it would be a very blameable rashness. But do not aspire or long after them; follow with simplicity the plain and common road, it is the safest; were you to think that you are drawn in a particular way, submit your thoughts and feelings to the judgment of your spiritual guide, and abide by his decision. One may be deluded and deceived in visions and ecstasies, said St. Theresa, in obedience never. Extraordinary graces are not necessary for the greatest sanctity; they are easily subject to illusions and dangers, unless tried by perfect humility and obedience; and whatever in them does not sensibly increase sincere and perfect humility is certain illusion. No man can ever think himself the better for them, or prefer himself to others, which is pride. No man is to rely on them, but only on the accomplishment of the divine law, and an humble obedience. Every one must be persuaded that crosses and tribulations are the royal and safest road to heaven, though God in his mercy and condescension to our weakness, sweetens them with his presence, peace and consolations.

This is the doctrine of the saints and the most experienced directors. Yet, it is not rare to meet with well-intentioned, but uninformed people, who, if they do not aim at, and boast of extraordinary favours in their mental prayer, have still erroneous notions on this important subject, which if they would not be guarded against, might lead them to a dangerous fanaticism. They make mental prayer consist chiefly in the lively and tender feelings which sometimes attend it; they judge of their advancement in virtue by the degree or intensity of the sensible pleasure which they feel during this spiritual exercise; feelings are the criterion of their dispositions; for them there is nothing true, nothing



solid, nothing desirable, but what can procure sweetness in devotion. As long as they enjoy them, they undertake with boldness, and decide in the most peremptory manner; nothing can stop them, no authority can moderate their excessive, and too often their indiscreet and blind zeal. But if these spiritual comforts begin to abate or are entirely gone, they fall into sullenness, low spirits, and despondency; they grow relaxed, leave off successively some of their pious exercises, and not seldom abandon themselves to negligence and dissipation. One may say of them that they follow Jesus Christ, but to eat of the loaves miraculously multiplied in the desert. Like St. Peter, they are ready to raise "tabernacles" on mount Tabor, and say, "Oh! good it is for us to be here."—Luke ix. 33. But if they be told that they must also follow this divine Saviour to mount Calvary, to carry their cross after him, and deny themselves, you will hear them say, "This saying is hard and who can bear it."—John vi. 61. And imitating the ingratitude of some of his disciples, they leave him "and walk no more with him."

Mental prayer is not the work of the imagination and of the senses, it is the result of calm and serious reflections upon the high importance, and great advantage, of having our mind deeply penetrated with the awful truths of our religion. It is inseparable from a sound judgment and upright intentions. The person who wishes to perform this pious exercise in a truly profitable manner must endeavour to remove his thoughts from exterior and temporal objects, and to enter into his soul; and having put himself in the presence of God, reflect with all the attention he is capable of, on the peculiar truth which he has chosen to be the subject of his meditation,—turn all his considerations to the correction of his defects, and the measures the best calculated to accomplish it; then

conclude by a firm resolution to fulfil with fidelity all his duties towards God and our neighbour. Happy is the soul, who in this pious exercise is equally faithful under the hardest trials, as well as in the sweetest enjoyments. "She shall be as mount Sion, and shall never be moved." She eats the daily bread of a pure faith, she is neither longing nor seeking with anxiety after comforts which God withdraws from her, nor solicitous to foresee what he hides from her. Peaceable under his providence, she believes with simplicity all that which the Catholic Church teaches, and tries to do with unabated zeal whatever the Gospel commands or counsels. If consolations be given her, she accepts them with gratitude as the support of her frailty; if taken away from her, she bears it with patience. It is the attachment to sensible feelings, which is the cause of discouragement and distress to those who are addicted to mental prayer. On the contrary, a constant fidelity in the privation of them, preserves from error and deception, and ultimately procures an unalterable peace. When we lose sensible devotion, without having been by our infidelities the cause of that loss, we lose only what a child does when it is weaned by its parent. A dry and hard piece of bread is not so sweet and so agreeable to the taste, but is much more nourishing than milk. The correction of a wise and prudent preceptor, does much more good than the fond caresses of a nurse.

You tell me that you are very much tormented by distractions during the time you dedicate to meditation or mental prayer; that you cannot stop the wanderings of your imagination which, in spite of yourself, bring before you a thousand useless, frivolous, and sometimes even dangerous objects, that, habituated as you have been to gratify your curiosity, and to submit every thing to the tribunal of your reason, you are troubled, uneasy, dis-

contented, when you cannot solve the difficulties which occur to your mind; that in the course of the day you are quiet, and in some degree collected; but that at the moment you begin your meditation, and when you most sincerely wish to be absorbed in the contemplation of eternal truths, a crowd of importunate thoughts assail you, that concerns merely temporal, family cares, solitudes about your husband, children, friends, and domestics, useless reflections on the past, and anxious foresight with regard to the future, seem to have given themselves a general rendezvous, in order to keep exclusively under their dominion all the faculties of your mind and the sentiments of your heart; in short, that fatigued, exhausted by your vain efforts to keep your mind collected, you are tempted to give up meditation as a loss of time, and as a pious exercise not fit for you, since often at the end of your meditation the only impression that remains is, that you have made no meditation at all. I shall answer you, that it is especially by the will that we pray or meditate, and of course that a sincere will and constant intention of praying, is a good prayer. Distractions which are really involuntary, do not interrupt and hinder the tendency of the heart towards God—notwithstanding the distractions, there remains what is called by divines a *virtual intention* of praying, which is prayer—it is an occupation of God in desire, a certain secret inward prayer really existing, though unperceived and hidden like fire under ashes.

Whenever you perceive that your mind is distracted, do your best to repel the distraction, but gently letting it, as it were, fall upon the ground without looking at it, and resume with peace the subject of your meditation. Short aspirations, and acts of love and desire are easy and of great benefit, when we become sensible of the distractions; but be careful not to attack them with

impetuosity, and face to face, it would be another distraction worse than the first. The more you give way to agitation, the more agitated will your imagination be; you will not enjoy a moment of rest; whilst the more quietly you return to your meditation, the more effectually you will acquire the habit of recollection, and the more easily you will be occupied within by spiritual things. To harass yourself, and strive with incessant anxiety to get rid of all distractions, would be an endless and unsuccessful labour; by doing so, you would lose a most precious time in driving away flies that tease you with their troublesome noise. Let them buzz around your ears, and continue your work as if they were at a great distance from you. Be assured that their buzzing will do you no harm; believe me, involuntary distractions are only teasing flies, bear them with an humble patience, their importunity will make you gain great merits.

Avoid to dive with an anxious and intense curiosity into your soul, in order to know whether it is in a state of dryness or of intimate union with God; and still less ought you to wonder to be left in a profound darkness, and to grieve because it is not in your power to remove it. This is an invariable rule, from which you should never depart. St. Francis of Sales said of himself, "I do not know whether I am visited with comfort, or sadness, or desolation." With regard to meditation or mental prayer, nothing is so essential as to be disengaged from troubles and perplexities; therefore lay aside all useless inquiries about things which we cannot prevent nor remedy; go straight to Jesus Christ by dying to yourself, in perfect conformity to his adorable will, and whatever may be your feelings, remain in peace at his sacred feet.

Before you begin your meditation endeavour to be collected in the presence of God; say to him, if not by

word of mouth, at least by the desires of a loving and grateful heart, Thou beholdest, O Lord, my incapacity and distress, I cannot fix my mind even for a few minutes together, and my heart is cold, dry, without feeling; yet, through thy grace, I most sincerely wish to be attentive to thy voice, and united to thee by bands of the most ardent love; and though I am deprived of the consoling consciousness or sensible feeling of such dispositions, permit me to repeat with the royal prophet, "My soul hath coveted to long for thy justifications at all times."—Ps. cxviii. 20. This done, entertain a confident hope that God will look down with a propitious eye on your pious desires and the humble and filial confidence you have put in his mercy. Oh! how much more indulgent a father, compassionate and devoted a friend, is our heavenly father, than the most affectionate and tender fathers and friends upon earth, their friendship for us is but a feeble emanation of his, it is but a drop issuing from that inexhaustible source of goodness and benevolence. Why, then, should we be discouraged at the daily experience of our weakness and inability? Provided our distractions and aridities in mental prayer are not the consequences of our infidelity and dissipation at other times, our divine Saviour will, by the application of his merits, supply what is and ever shall be so greatly deficient in us. But if we live a worldly life, if we let our minds to be entirely engrossed by temporal concerns, and "choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life" (Luke viii. 14); if we never make the least efforts to stop the wanderings of our imagination, it is impossible that we should be collected during our mental prayer. And although at the time we should be glad to be free from distractions, yet they are justly imputed as a fault to us, because we did not take the proper means to prevent them, and of

course they are considered voluntary, at least in their cause.

Moreover there is a remote preparation indispensable before mental and vocal prayer. "Before prayer," says Ecclesiasticus "prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God." Eccl. xviii. 23. This remote preparation consists chiefly, 1st, in an habitual presence of God: "Walk before me, and be perfect," said God to Abraham (Gen. xvii. 1); 2dly, in a thorough conviction, that his all-wise and unerring Providence ordains, or permits all that which takes place both in the general government of the world, and all the various occurrences of each man's life; that he who has numbered "all the very hairs of our head" (Matt. x. 30) watches over us with more than paternal care, and if we faithfully correspond to his grace, he will direct every thing for our greater good. 3dly, in performing all our actions, even those which seem the most insignificant, with the intention of pleasing him, and accomplishing the duties which he has imposed upon us. Consider in what manner your servants attend upon you, execute your orders, how careful they are to please you, overjoyed when you show them that you are satisfied with their service, and often bear your rebukes without uttering a complaint. Were they to be so much taken up with their personal concerns, as to neglect their duties towards you, you would soon discharge them. Learn from their conduct in your regard, how quickly you ought to comply with the commandments of God, apply yourself to the work which he has committed to you, how attentive you should be to correct your defects, avoid all that which might expose you to incur his displeasure, and bear with an humble resignation the disappointments and crosses he may think proper to send you. With this previous preparation, you will expe-

rience that your distractions will insensibly diminish, and that the usual cause of them will raise your thoughts to him, and be conducive to your recollection. "Behold as the eyes of the servants are on the hands of their masters, and as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so ought your eyes to be unto the Lord our God."—Ps. cxxii. 2.

Do not undertake any thing without a solid reason; retrench all useless occupations, and in those which duty, propriety, or the relations of social life command, avoid eagerness and too great activity. Divert your mind from the things of this world, as long as necessity does not require of you that you should pay attention to them, and often turn your thoughts to your eternal concerns. This habitual disposition is particularly recommended in the Holy Scriptures; it is said of Mary, sister of Martha, that "she had chosen the best part, because sitting at the Lord's feet, she heard his voice, while Martha was troubled and over-careful about many things."—Luke x. 40, 41. Send up to heaven short and fervent aspirations, begging of God to inspire you with, and put on your lips what you have to say, and guide you in all you have to do. Implore his assistance before you enter into any company, or begin any thing which might be an occasion of faults or temptations. When you perceive that you have been dissipated or carried too far in your conversation with others, humble yourself and renew your former good resolutions. In short habituate yourself to consider God in all creatures and all creatures in God. Thus you will always be prepared for mental prayer. And if, notwithstanding those precautions, you were during this spiritual exercise, still molested with distractions, by following the rules which I have given you they will not be injurious to you, and you will have the most solid motives

to hope, that they are trials which the Almighty permits you should pass through, in order to enable you to serve him with greater purity and disinterestedness.

I have dwelt longer on this subject than is usually done, because a long experience has proved, that without the help of meditation or mental prayer, one is very much exposed to fall into remissness and tepidity, and adopt relaxed and false notions with regard to the means of which we should make use to secure our eternal salvation. "Thy words have I hidden in my heart that I may not sin against thee."—Ps. cxviii. 11.

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## X.

### THE CHARACTERS OF SOLID PIETY.

In order to give a proof of the sincerity of your actual sentiments, you need not to make an ostentatious display of your return to the bosom of the Catholic Church, nor consider it as a duty to give a circumstantial account of the secret operations of divine grace which have produced in you the happy change. Real necessity, or the utility of others, must be your guides in this regard. The recital of conversions when done by the interested parties, is seldom attended with great benefit. Nay, sometimes it is an occasion for worldlings to spread injurious suspicions against the true religion, and to impute to the new converts human and selfish motives. Yet at the same time you ought to be very careful not to seem ashamed of what you have done. By the whole tenour of your conduct, you must show without affectation, that neither human respect, nor any temporal considerations, will ever induce you to hide the faith which you now profess, nor lay aside, and neglect the accomplishment of the new and sacred



obligations which you have contracted. It is not requisite for this purpose to assume an austere countenance, keep your eyes always cast down, defend your sentiments with warmth, and strive with an intemperate and unseasonable zeal to bring others to your way of thinking. It is as blameable to speak with pride and temerity on religious subjects, as to remain silent, from shame, when duty or charity should induce us to make known what we consider to be the truth. True and solid piety, says St. Austin, consists in the habitual disposition of the heart to consult the will of God in all things, and to follow it with implicit obedience. Piety does not always avoid to be seen, but when she is obliged to show herself, it is with that amiable and humble simplicity, which is one of her distinguishing characteristics. Exempt from pretensions, she neither fears nor wishes to be known, only occupied to please God, her whole attention is directed to be informed of what he may require of her, without troubling herself whether it will redound to her praise or humiliation; consequently she is not proud of the esteem of men, nor offended at their contempt. When the occasion of doing good occurs, she does it either publicly or privately, as she judges it to be the will of God, and as it presents itself. Far from wishing to attract the attention of others by borrowed ornaments, she is ingenious to conceal her native beauty, and, if she lets some little part of it be discovered, it is easy to perceive, that her motive was not to be looked at and admired, but that it is by mere chance, or that men moved by her example, might be invited to glorify our heavenly Father. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven."—Matt. v. 19.

Endeavour by your sweet and engaging demeanour

to render your devotion both amiable and respectable. Practise all your pious exercises in an humble and simple, but noble and generous manner, having chiefly and constantly in view to fulfil all your duties from the principle of the love of God, and taking care not to expose yourself justly to blame, by scrupulous perplexities, and ill-grounded hesitation about insignificant things. The love of God enlightens the mind, dilates the heart, and enables to decide ourselves without anxiety in unforeseen and necessary occurrences. God requires of the generality of men only to live a pure, irreproachable, and pious life, and to do for his sake what unprejudiced reason alone would command to do. Piety is neither weak, stiff, or melancholy; it is always attended with evenness of temper, and modest cheerfulness; it teaches us to make ourselves all to all, in order to gain all to God. In the Christian whose piety is sincere and well instructed, and who by the meditation of the Gospel and his fervent prayers, has overcome self-love, and habituated himself to self-denial, and to take for the rule of his judgments and actions the will of God and his divine precepts, all is conducive to and an example of virtue. The love of God being predominant in his heart, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline (Philip. iv. 8), he always thinks on these things." His intercourse with his relatives, friends, equals, or inferiors, although it has nothing extraordinary, yet is marked out by particular characters of loveliness, and truly evangelical perfection. In the midst of temporal occupations and concerns, "his conversation continues to be in heaven." He avails himself of every moment of liberty to speak inwardly to the beloved of his heart;

he listens to his voice; he praises, adores, and presents him the homage of his whole being; his mental prayer is fervent, but without effort and enthusiasm; his humility is profound, but without baseness; his mortification continual, but secret; his reserve edifying, but unaffected; exact without sternness or severity, modest with simplicity, virtuous without self-complacency, generous and kind-hearted without ostentation, indulgent without weakness. His looks, the sound of his voice, his expressions remove all suspicion of vanity or artifice. His uprightness, candour, pure intentions, and desire of promoting the happiness of others as far as it is in his power, and can be reconciled with the dictates of his conscience, are discernible in his very silence, and bespeak the sentiments of his heart. The amiability and benevolence which shine in his countenance, give to all that which he says or does a sort of dumb but powerful eloquence, which charms and gains all those who have the advantage of seeing and hearing him. Worldlings themselves, notwithstanding their malignity, prejudices, infatuation, and censures and contempt of devout people, are compelled secretly to admire and esteem them, when their devotion is adorned with these holy and lovely qualities. Unaffected piety conjoined with inviolable uprightness and integrity of conduct, commands a degree of respect which approaches to veneration. Candour and fairness never fail to attract esteem and trust. Kindness and benevolence conciliate love, and create warm friendship. The best character may indeed for a time, be accidentally obscured and misrepresented or misunderstood, but the world commonly judges soundly in the end. It would seem that the intimate union of the just man with Jesus Christ, reflects upon him something divine, or, as formerly on mount Tabor, it happened to three apostles,

some ray of that heavenly splendour, which the eternal Father poured forth on his beloved Son, and which does not leave any one at liberty to refuse to virtue the respect and homage to which it is entitled ; and thus without seeking and being aware of it, it exercises upon the opinions of others an influence almost irresistible. It is an inalienable right of which it is very seldom deprived ; for, through the most unaccountable inconsistency and blindness, the world contemns the passions which it excites and promotes, and venerates virtue which it strives to destroy. Amiable, humble, and modest piety, why art thou so little known ? Why are thy followers represented as a set of miserable slaves living a melancholy life, and groaning under a galling yoke, whilst thou art the principle of true liberty, by delivering us from the tyranny of our passions ? Why art thou shunned as an obstacle to happiness, whilst it is only under thy sweet laws that there is peace, comfort, and pure delights ; whilst thou alone canst support us in the trials, troubles, and sorrows inseparable from our passage through this land of exile ? “ O ! better is one day in thy courts above thousands ! ”

When our actions are well ordained, and conformable to the maxims of the Gospel, we have nothing to change in our exterior conduct ; we are only obliged to do for the greater glory of God, what men of probity do from motives of honour and self-interest ; we have only to retrench out of obedience to his injunctions, what we should be in duty bound to do were we to listen to sound reason. Let us therefore do all that is honourable, just, praiseworthy, but in reference to the will and from the love of him who has created us, and to whom we owe all that which we are and possess. As for the rest let us leave it in the order in which his divine Providence has placed it. No consideration of

advantage, praise, or reputation, no allurements of society, intimacy, respect, deference, kindred, should induce you to approve of, or condescend to things condemned by the Gospel and the Catholic Church. You must maintain, adhere to with a modest courage, and perform without hesitation, all that which your conscience dictates, viz., your meditations, prayers, confessions, communions, and other good works, either privately or publicly, as it is consistent with propriety, and peculiar circumstances of days and places. Thus you will avoid the danger of yielding to affectation or vanity, or to false shame and timidity, which otherwise would by insensible degrees seduce you to an abandonment of your good purposes.

Those who have sincerely and openly given up the vanities of the world, and are judged as particularly exact and punctual in their practices of devotion, ought to be very attentive to, and watch over all their actions, lest by indulging their defects they should expose piety itself to be misrepresented and calumniated by its enemies. For worldly people that are always ready to palliate and justify their own most glaring disorders, are extremely sharp-sighted to discover the least blemishes in the conduct of the servants of God, require of them with an extreme severity that they should be quite irreproachable, and that nothing in their whole life should belie the sanctity of their profession. If in this regard they do not answer the expectation of the world, if they behave like other men, and their piety be not exempt from the weaknesses incident to the generality of their fellow-creatures ; if, for example, a lady, who is looked upon as devout, be still liable to fits of vivacity, or ill-humour ; if she give way to little jealousies, self-seeking, susceptibility, untruths, deceits, or detraction, it is a triumph for the wicked, and a sort of encouragement for

them to persevere in the gratification of their unruly passions. I am very sensible that in their censures of devotion they are almost always guilty of downright injustice, or at least of the greatest exaggeration, and that, if in respect to the defects of others, they "strain out a gnat," concerning their own "they swallow a camel."—Matt. xxiii. 24. But it is for this very reason, says St. Chrysostome, that those who wish to serve God with spirit and truth ought to guard themselves with greater zeal against the least imperfections and infidelities, "Showing themselves," according to the precept of St. Paul, "an example of good works, in doctrine, in integrity, in gravity, that they who are in the contrary part may be afraid, having no evil to say of them."—Tit. ii. 8.

When the Spirit of God has driven out from a soul the spirit of the world, her desires, views, inclinations, and thoughts are quite different from what they were before. The objects upon which she dwelt with complacency and pleasure become indifferent, and sometimes hateful to her. The Holy Ghost makes her find within herself her happiness, because there she is sure to find the beloved; it is her sweetest occupation to recal herself to this centre of all her affections; it is with difficulty that she can be prevailed upon to leave it; and, in the dissipation and exterior engagements which the duties of social life render unavoidable, she often returns to it as to a place of rest and safety. In the bustle of the vain conversations which she cannot help hearing, she retires unperceived into the secret solitude which she has prepared in her heart, and there she communes with the Lord, who has vouchsafed to choose it for his abode; there she complains with a filial liberty to him of the sad necessity which she is still under of being engaged in so many temporal concerns. By continual acts of

love, zeal, and gratitude, she endeavours to offer him reparation for all the outrages committed against him, and of which she is so often an unwilling witness. She appeals to his holy law and unerring truth from the vain and false maxims of worldly wisdom. To him alone she has recourse in all occurrences, and in him she reposes with unreserved and unshaken confidence. "In peace, in the selfsame, I will sleep and I will rest; for thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope" (Ps. iv. 9, 10), does she say with the royal Psalmist.

One may say, in some sense, that the life of a soul that is truly animated with the Spirit of God is wholly interior and invisible. All that she does proceeds from a divine and invisible principle. Her most insignificant actions become holy from the secret faith that purifies them. Either she eats or drinks, rejoices or grieves, is supernaturally enlightened or left in darkness, in abundance or penury, in health or sickness, in all these different states she finds a source of holy reflections. She sees nothing but with the eyes of faith. The events and vicissitudes of the world, the revolutions of empires and nations, the ruin or elevation of families, the prosperity or calamities of the age, the degeneracy or restoration of manners, the fall of the just, or the conversion of sinners, the lesser or greater influence of truth, among men, the difficulties or the peace of the church, the disgraces or favours of individuals, in short all those eternal revolutions which the figure of this world presents in a constant succession to our bewildered eyes, and which in worldlings awaken only thoughts of flesh and blood and the passions of the world, are continual causes of praise and admiration, and consequently always most profitable for a soul thoroughly penetrated with the Spirit of God. All that is passing away with time she beholds in the will of God, and submits to it without

murmuring, because it is his good pleasure. She wonders at nothing, being well assured that she is under the government of the Supreme Being, whose decrees over the children of men are dictated by infinite wisdom and mercy. All that she sees or hears recalls to her mind the truths of faith ; every thing displays before her in a new and most striking light the nothingness of all human and temporal things, and the high importance and unspeakable value of eternal blessings. The whole world is for her a book always open, in which she discovers the wonderful ways of God and the prodigious blindness of the generality of men.

The Holy Ghost raises a soul animated with his spirit above herself ; he communicates to her, as far as she is capable of bearing it, some part of his grandeur and power ; he engraves in her the divine characters of a wise liberty and independence ; he places her in the bosom of the Deity, from whence, casting down her eyes upon this sublunary world, all earthly greatness and threats appear as a vain and almost imperceptible atom, incapable of intimidating her, from the paths of virtue, and even unworthy to attract and fix her attention for a moment. Nothing can be compared to the elevation, generosity, and fortitude of such a soul : “He that walketh without blemish and worketh justice shall not be moved for ever.”—Ps. xiv. 2, 4. How different it is with the adherents of the world—being jealous of obtaining its favours, they are always afraid of losing them. If sometimes they exhibit firmness and elevation of character, these laudable qualities are tainted with pride, and blended with base condescensions, because they continue to be under its influence, and depending on its caprice and inconsistencies. But the pious soul fears nothing, because she makes no account of its opinions. Its praises or mockery and scorn she slights and disre-



gards, and she receives from them no other impression than as from the sound of a tinkling cymbal. Incapable of those timid and pusillanimous condescensions so injurious to piety, and which, instead of edifying the worldlings which require them, rather tend to confirm them in their unjust and erroneous notions, she honours virtue with a courageous and modest assurance in the presence of those who despise its maxims and neglect its precepts. In fine, she shows no deference but to truth alone, and no other complaisance but that which uprightness allows or charity commands.

Moreover as the pious soul, during her pilgrimage, is still encompassed with a mortal frame, we should not wonder, if now and then being taken unawares, she be seduced by the external objects which surround her on all sides, and be carried away by the torrent for a short time. Less attentive than usual to the momentous truths of religion she may sometimes yield to the influence of human maxims or prejudices—forget herself for a few moments in the middle of the inevitable dissipations of the world, and thus lose the feeling of the presence of God residing in the bottom of her heart. But this forgetfulness and these slight deviations from the right track do not last long. Soon admonished by the secret reproaches of her conscience, she immediately acknowledges her fault; and, conscious of her weakness, she hastens with greater eagerness to hide herself again in that domestic sanctuary from which she had been drawn away by the allurements of the world, and penetrated with a hearty sorrow of her ingratitude, she endeavours, by the most lively acts of contrition and her abundant tears, to make a reparation, and atone for that momentary neglect of her duties. Nay, from her short mixing with the world, she acknowledges more and more its nothingness, and the fallacy of its flattering

promises ; and, from the experience she has again made of her own weakness, she derives the most powerful motives to watch over natural feelings and propensities with more care and vigilance, and to attach herself to God without restriction or reserve, as to the only source of pure and permanent pleasures.

Let the first commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength" (Mark xii. 30), be the habitual subject of your thoughts and reflections. Divine love enlightens the soul, inspires her with the relish of truth, and makes her live the true life, that is to say, the life of Jesus Christ. But how few there are, even among those who are reckoned as pious people, who rightly understand the full extent of this divine precept, and that, in obedience to it, we ought to love nothing but in God, and for God. Most men have no other idea of God, but that of an incomprehensible being, "inhabiting light inaccessible" (1 Tim. vi. 16), at an immeasurable distance from us, and whose nature and attributes our limited reason cannot penetrate. He is considered, besides, as a severe and powerful Sovereign and Judge, who requires a great deal from us, whose laws and precepts thwart our natural inclinations, who threatens us with eternal punishments if we do not comply with his commands, and against the awful judgment of whom we must be extremely careful to guard ourselves. Such are generally the notions of those who have made serious reflections upon religion, and yet there are few who go so far. It is often said, such a one is a person fearing God. It is true, he fears and obeys him, but without loving him. He resembles in his conduct children who fear the teacher that corrects and punishes them ; or like slaves, who, without taking the least interest in the welfare of

their masters, serve them only from servile fear, and to escape the lash. Should we like to be treated by a son or a servant as we are not ashamed to act with God? Should we be satisfied, if entirely destitute of affection for us, they served us only from compulsion or selfish views? Why are our sentiments towards God so unworthy of him? It is because we do not know him under the amiable characters he has so clearly revealed to us of himself; for, if we did, we should certainly love him.

O my God, thou art all in all! and the generality of men do not see thee, and attribute nothing to thee. Yet to find thee it is not necessary to penetrate into the inmost bowels of the earth, to go beyond the seas, or fly up to heaven (Deut. xxx.), as thy prophets declare. Still thou art unknown, O Lord God, thy perfections are not comprehended, although thou hast been pleased to manifest them to us as far as we were capable of understanding. "The light shineth in darkness, and darkness did not comprehend it."—John i. 5. Universal Light, Sun of our souls, that shinest with greater splendour than the material sun that illuminates our globe; we see nothing but through thee, and yet thou art not seen! It is through thee that man lives, thinks, feels, and enjoys any pure and innocent pleasure; and, although it is to thee alone that we owe all these blessings, yet thou art forgotten! From thy bountiful hand all comes. Thou givest to the planets and stars their light, to the fountains their waters, to the earth its plants and trees, to the fruit their savour, to the flowers their brilliancy and perfume, to all nature its riches and beauty, and to mankind life, health, reason, and virtue. Thou givest, doest, regulatest all. I see but thee: all the rest disappears as a fleeting shadow from before the eyes of him who has enjoyed only once by faith, the

unspeakable happiness of seeing thee. But, alas ! those who are unacquainted with thee have seen nothing ; their life has been but the illusion of a dream ; they are as if they were not. Infatuated men ! “ Having eyes they see not, having ears they hear not ; they do not know nor understand, their heart is blinded by their passions ” (Mark viii. 17) ; yet the vain and frivolous decorations of this world are rapidly vanishing away ; the last hour is near at hand—it is ready to strike. Death is moving on towards us with accelerated strides ; he has already stretched forth his merciless and irresistible hand over us. In the twinkling of an eye the charm will be broken off, our eyes shall in a moment be wide opened, we shall then see only the eternal truth. Then God shall appear in the full blaze of his awful majesty to judge mankind—then all those who have enjoyed the reputation of wisdom shall be undeceived, and compelled to acknowledge, to their eternal shame and unavailable regret and sorrow, that “ with God the wisdom of this world is foolishness, and the thoughts of the wise are vain.”—1 Cor. iii. 19. O ! let us do our best, and without loss of time, not to be included in their condemnation. You especially, madam, who have been “ prevented with blessings of sweetness,” on whom so many signal favours have been conferred, could you, without ingratitude, offer up to God only a divided heart ? Has he not acquired a sacred and irrevocable right to possess it entirely ?

This love of God with which I so ardently wish you to be animated, does not require of the generality of Christians austerities similar to those of the ancient solitaries, nor their profound silence and contemplation. It does not usually prescribe extraordinary and heroic actions, nor the abandonment of a fortune lawfully acquired, nor the renouncing of the peculiar advantages

attached to such condition. It only, but strictly, enjoins the practice of justice, moderation, and sobriety in the enjoyment of his gifts, making use of them according to his precepts, and as means of tending to him, "Using this world," as St. Paul says, "as if they used it not" (1 Cor. vii. 31), it forbids only to set our heart and affections on temporal blessings, as if in the possession of them true happiness consisted. The love of God does not change, trouble, or overturn the order established by him in the various classes or ranks which constitute human societies. It leaves the great in their grandeur, teaching them to be humble, charitable, tender-hearted, under the hand of the sovereign Giver of all good gifts. The poor he renders satisfied and happy in their low condition, by inspiring them with moderate desires, and making them feel the precious advantages of a state of life, in which, if there be no sensual delights, there are less occasions of gratifying the passions, and more powerful means of working their salvation.

We read in the *Lives of the Saints* that God revealed to St. Macarius, of Egypt, that he had not attained to the perfection of two married women, who lived in a certain town. He paid them a visit, and learned the means by which they sanctified themselves. Nothing singular was remarked in their conduct; but they were extremely careful never to speak any idle or rash words. They lived in the constant practice of humility, patience, meekness, charity, resignation, mortification of their own will, and conformity to the will of their husbands and others, when the divine law did not interpose. In a spirit of recollection they performed all their actions, and sanctified them by ardent ejaculations, by which they strove to praise God, and most fervently to conse-

crate to the divine glory all the powers of their soul and body.—*Butler's Lives of the Saints.*

Divine love, says St. Bernard, is both a merit and the reward of merit. I love, continues this great saint, because I love, and I love in order to love more and more. Love is a sublime and heroic sentiment, if it be referred to the divine Fountain-head, from which it proceeds, and flows without intermission. Of all the feelings, affections, or sensations of the human heart, love is the only one by which the reasonable creature can make, though in an infinitely inadequate manner, some kind of a return to God for his manifold and ineffable blessings. For instance, if God be irritated against me, can I oppose wrath to wrath? No, I shall fear, tremble, and beseech him to forgive me. If he reprehend me shall I accuse him of blindness, injustice, or partiality? My conscience would rise against me—my excuses would render me more guilty, and justify him. If he judge me shall I presume to judge him, or appeal to a higher tribunal? No, I shall annihilate myself before his awful majesty, adore his judgments, and implore his mercy. If he vouchsafe to save my soul, would it not be a real madness in me to fancy that I can deliver him from any inconvenience? But to his love in my regard I can in return offer up my love to him; thus, by this reciprocity of sentiments, I approach to God as near as a created being is capable, and, by fulfilling the duty of loving him upon earth, I secure to myself the happiness of loving him through all eternity. “Let us, therefore, love God, because God first loved us.”—1 John iv. 19.

Servile fear may, and generally does, fill the heart with amazement and terror; it may stop the hand, but cannot change the inclinations. When the law of God makes no other impression upon us, but an impression

of fright, the outside of the soul (if we can be allowed to use such an expression) only is moved, but the inside remains in the same dispositions. Love alone has the key of our heart, and can alter, moderate, and direct its motions or feelings. If we be so unfortunate as to feel the impulse of bad propensities or inordinate affections, we shall never be able to be delivered from them, but by the influence of divine love, and by a pure and earnest desire of the sovereign good. Love enlarges and dilates all the faculties of the soul; it opens all the avenues leading to it, and disposes it to receive the salutary and reviving dew of heavenly graces. When love has taken possession of the heart, it is no longer a hard stone, upon which the word of God falling, soon withers away; but a good and soft ground, which makes it "spring up, and yield fruit a hundred fold."—Luke viii. 5—7. Thus it may be said, that our most merciful Saviour is imprinted in our whole being. He is in the will, which is always tending to him; he is in the memory that can never forget all his favours; he is in the understanding, that can find no sweeter occupation than in the contemplation of his infinite perfections. From the heart where he reigns without a rival, and the affections of which he directs, he expands his sweet influence over all exterior actions, good works, and virtues, which, proceeding only from him, exhibit some faint image of his divine benevolence and charity.

Such are the distinguishing characteristics of solid piety which I have so very imperfectly delineated. Yet, I hope that what I have said, will be sufficient to point out to you the road in which you ought to walk, the principles which ought to guide you, the spirit which must animate all your practices of devotion, and the manner you must perform them outwardly that they may be acceptable before God and edifying to men.

## XI.

## ON THE DESIRE OF PERFECTION.

You tell me in your letter of the — inst., that whenever you recal to your mind the precept of the Gospel, “Be you perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. v. 48), you feel an ardent desire of accomplishing it, and at the same time an anxiety and a sort of dread which you are at a loss to reconcile with this desire. A few reflections will, I hope, remove your doubts and perplexities on the subject. Your desire of attaining to perfection is a proof that the love of God continues to predominate in your heart, and that you have a sincere resolution to advance in virtue. The fear comes from a secret self-love whispering to you that the labours and restraints attending perfection are tedious and too hard for our weakness, and destructive of our comfort.

It is true that the principles of perfection are severe ; therefore, it is congenial to our frail nature to be in some degree frightened at the thought of applying them to the regulation of our conduct. But you must observe, that perfection is not proposed to us as an end which we ought to attain in a day, but by degrees, step by step, and according to the measure of the grace which Almighty God is pleased to grant to us. Remember what you told me at your return from Switzerland. You assured me then, that when you were at the foot of mount St. Bernard, and from the valley you beheld its immense height, the first thought that struck you was, that you could not, through its steep and craggy cliffs, climb up without being tired to death, to its summit



covered with eternal snow ; but that being encouraged by the example of so many ladies of your age and country who had made the journey before you without inconvenience, and by taking, at different intervals, a sufficient time to repose yourself, and recruit your strength according to the advice of your guides, you at length reached the top without great fatigue, and were delighted not to have yielded to your fears. It is so with regard to perfection, viewed at a distance, and considering only our abilities, to attain it will appear to us an almost hopeless undertaking ; but, by tending to it with moderation and prudence, under the guidance of a wise and experienced director, and by not attempting to do in a day what may require a month or a year, you will find that God will reward your perseverance, and that your efforts will be crowned with ultimate success. The fear you have felt at the thought that it might be a duty incumbent upon you to aspire to perfection, is a sign that nature has still a great power over you. But be not discouraged, entertain a confident hope that God will never require from you the exercise of any virtue without giving you, at the same time, the grace necessary for that purpose. When we enjoy good health, and the body is sound, we sometimes do not feel its contact with exterior objects, and thus are thereby imboldened to expose ourselves without precaution to the danger of being seriously hurt ; whilst the slightest touch or rubbing upon a wound makes us cry out immediately from pain, and admonishes us to guard ourselves against the repetition of the same painful sensation. It is nearly the same with regard to the attainment of perfection ; it is a real advantage to feel pain and difficulties, because they are a salutary warning of our weakness, and of the necessity of having recourse to a higher power to help us. Besides, they point out

more clearly to us the defects which we have to correct.

Perfection does not consist in doing many and great things. It depends on the spirit with which we perform our ordinary actions, and fulfil the duties of our respective vocations. Hence tending to perfection ought to be our habitual disposition, and the occupation of every day of our life. We cannot work out our salvation without obeying the will of God ; and it is our conformity to it which renders our actions meritorious. Hence you must conclude that you never will be perfect but by the accomplishment of your duties. But, in order to attain perfection to this accomplishment, some indispensable conditions are to be added ; that is to say, it is not enough to do what our state of life requires, we must do it well. This is not all. There is a last degree of perfection which ought to influence all our actions, and be their main spring, their soul, and life ; viz., we must perform them all from a principle of religion and supernatural motives.

In all your desires and endeavours to attain to perfection, be guided by the two following indisputable rules : the first, that you ought to do your best to sanctify yourself in the condition of life in which an all-wise Providence has been pleased to place you, without engrossing your thoughts with projects or designs of perfection for the future, out of the order of the duties enjoined to you for the present. The second, to be constantly animated in your most insignificant actions with a sincere and ardent desire of pleasing God, and a firm resolution never to refuse him any sacrifice he may think fit to require from you.

There are Christians who idle away the best part of their life in useless reflections and regrets on their manner of living, proposing to themselves to change it for

a better on a future day, taking the best resolutions, devising the wisest plans for a time which they hope for, and perhaps will never be given to them, and thus losing, in vain and unprofitable projects, the fairest opportunities of doing good and sanctifying their souls.

Consider all speculative ideas of perfection as a very dangerous temptation. Our salvation is the work of all the days and moments of our mortal existence. There is no time more proper to attain to this desirable end than the time which God vouchsafes to give us, because it is a gratuitous gift which he grants us for this purpose; and if we neglect to make use of it we are far from being assured that he will grant it again to-morrow. The most ardent desires of salvation will not make us obtain it unless we take all the means necessary to secure to us that great happiness. They are not far remote from us; they are the graces which we have to-day at our disposal. The uncertainty of our life, which may be taken away from us at a minute's warning, should convince us that it is an unaccountable, as well as inexcusable temerity to postpone, to a future day, the execution of designs which, in the silence of the passions, we deem indispensable to preserve us from eternal misery.

Why do we make projects of perfection? It is undoubtedly because we judge them conducive to our salvation: therefore it is as much our duty to begin this important business to-day as ten years hence: in the engagements of social life as in the quiet liberty of the deepest solitude. With regard to our eternal concerns, we must always do what is the safest, being daily exposed to the awful alternative of gaining or losing all. Now, the state of life to which God has called us, and in which we are placed, is the situation in which we can more easily, nay, even with a reasonable hope of success,

work out our salvation. Any other condition than that in which we are (provided it be not incompatible with the duties of religion), although more perfect in itself, yet were we to lay aside our present obligations in order to raise ourselves to its eminence, instead of tending to perfection, all our endeavours would make us commit not only many imperfections, but even would be the cause of our ruin. If he had foreseen that salvation would be impossible in the courts of kings, or in those avocations of the world which are the necessary consequences of a social life, God would have given us a strict injunction not to be engaged in them. But it is quite the reverse ; it is himself who has made kings, and established the various ranks and conditions existing in human societies ; it is therefore his will not only that each of us should be saved in his respective condition, but even that we should in it attain the highest perfection. . “ By me kings reign, lawgivers decree just things, princes rule, and mighty decree justice.”—Prov. viii. 15, 16. “ The publicans coming (to St. John the Baptist) to be baptized, said to him, Master, what shall we do ? But he said to them, Do nothing more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers also asked him, saying, And what shall we do ? And he said to them, Do violence to no man, neither calumniate any man, and be content with your pay.”—Luke iii. 12, 13, 14.

If there be some danger in the circumstances in which you are, as there always are some in every state of life, do not on that account give way to despondency, but redouble your vigilance, God will be with you to save you from shipwreck. Vigilance does not consist in an overstrained and continual application of the mind. To watch over ourselves is to be habitually attentive to God ; to walk in his presence, in all our difficulties or temptations ; to consult and listen to him in the secrecy

of our souls; to shun useless and too familiar intercourse with the world; to love retirement, prayer, pious conversation, and take constant care to avoid what we know must be displeasing to him. You will certainly acknowledge that such a vigilance is not a laborious task, and that it can be practised in every state of life. Thus you will learn not to love the world, nor the things of the world; and by entering into its necessary concerns, and innocent usages, you will not be prevented from advancing every day towards perfection. Never forget that you are always under the eyes of God, and that himself dwells within you. This conviction will most efficaciously contribute to fortify you, and render your fidelity to him proof against all the suggestions of the world and our corrupt nature.

Accustom yourself, by an humble submission, to adore the will of God in the various decrees of his providence, and since he inspires you with an ardent desire of perfection, beg of him to grant you the necessary graces to obtain it in your actual state of life, doing with zeal and without sparing yourself, what you are certain he requires from you, either of little or high importance. If perfection depended on extraordinary and heroic actions, how few people could aspire to it? yet we know that it is to all Christians, without distinction, that our Saviour intended that this precept should be applied: "Be perfect as your father who is in heaven is perfect." Remember also, that it is only our fidelity in plain and ordinary things which can inspire us with a confident hope, that through the assistance of God's grace we shall be faithful in those that are great. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is great; and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater."—Luke xvi. 10. Moreover, a soul that is sincerely desirous to serve

God with all the perfection of which she is capable, never examines, when he has spoken to her heart, whether the thing which he enjoins her is little or great ; it is enough for her to know his will, to overcome all her repugnances, and make her set an inestimable value on the apparently most indifferent things, and animate her with a holy zeal to perform them with unshaken fidelity.

Such is the sophistry which self-love exercises over the generality of men, and too often also over people who make a public profession of piety, and exhibit a strong desire of perfection, that it is rare to find in them that unaffected and steady attention to please God in the accomplishment of the common duties of their respective states or conditions. In the exterior practices of public worship, in keeping the fasts, and assisting at all the solemnities of the Church, their exactitude can be presented as a perfect model. But how often all these good actions are tainted with human motives, and domestic virtues neglected ! They subscribe with a laudable generosity to public charitable undertakings ; but, by a deplorable inconsistency, in order to gratify this otherwise pious disposition, they put off under the most flimsy pretences, the just demands of their tradesmen, or servants ; they nourish their souls with the bread of the angels ; and, by their excessive expenses and prodigality, they deprive themselves of the means of assisting the poor. Yet they feel no remorse for all these transgressions of the law of God ; and comparing their exactness and fidelity in other respects, with the irreligious conduct of worldlings, they consider themselves as walking in the road to perfection. However, if we reflect for ever so little upon the corrupt propensities of the human heart, this strange and lamentable subversion of principles will be easily understood. It is because exterior prac-

tices are not so painful as the performance of duties which daily command self-denial, and resistance to our dearest inclinations. Hence, those complaints against devotion ; that those who pretend to sublime virtues are scrupulous about things which cost but very little to do well, whilst they are careless about the most essential obligations ; and that without troubling oneself about practices, the only true and solid piety is to pay one's debts ; to render to every one what belongs to him, and to exercise benevolence and charity. To silence these surmises of worldly wisdom, the invariable rule which we ought to follow and adhere to, with the utmost fidelity, with regard to practices of exterior devotion, and our duties towards God and our neighbour, is contained in this short precept of our Lord. Alluding to the hypocrisy the Pharisees who, with scrupulosity, tithed mint, rue, and every herb : and passed over judgment and the charity of God, he said, " Now these things you ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone."—Luke xi. 44.

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## XII.

### ON THE DUTIES OF SOCIAL LIFE.

The intimate union which so happily subsists between you and your husband, his love and esteem for you, and to which you are so deservedly entitled, will, perhaps, induce you to consider the advice which I am going to give you as quite useless. Yet, wishing to forewarn you of every possible contingency which might be for you an occasion of trouble and affliction, it seems to me that it is a duty incumbent upon me, to speak to you without reserve upon a subject, in which your present as well as

future happiness may be so highly concerned. I hope, therefore, that you will read the following reflections with your usual kindness and indulgence. In the present state of human affairs, we are so closely interwoven with one another, that a very material part of our happiness or misery arises from the connexions we have with those who are around us, and the relations in which we stand to them. The nearer that men approach to each other, the more numerous the points of contact are in which they touch, the greater, indeed, will be the pleasure of perfect sympathy and agreements of feeling; but at the same time, if any harsh and repulsive sensations take place, the more grating and pungent will be the pain. But as there is no connexion so close and intimate as that which subsists between husband and wife; there is no state of life in which there are so many occasions of strife, and consequently of so many disappointments and unavailing regrets.

In marriages over which prudence and religion have presided, and in which the two contracting parties had, by a previous acquaintance with one another, acquired the greatest probability (certainty cannot be obtained but by living together) that their tempers and dispositions are perfectly suited to each other, and will constantly harmonize together, there may still arise unforeseen causes of uneasiness. In this sublunary world, an uninterrupted sunshine cannot be expected. To the most serene day, mists, clouds, and storms often succeed. Matrimony is, without doubt, destined to be a source of comforts to the married pair. This object is clearly marked out in the passage of Genesis: "It is not good for a man to be alone, let us make him a help like unto himself."—Gen. ii. 18. To be united to a man of probity, whom she is authorized to look upon as a sincere friend, in whose bosom she will at all times have the



liberty to deposit her sorrows, secrets, and joys, and who will ever be attentive to procure her in sickness as well as in health, not only the necessities, but even the conveniences and sweets of life, is surely a very inviting prospect for a young lady. But if she considers a matrimonial alliance only in this point of view; if she do not foresee, that it is also an association of weaknesses, frailties, defects, and miseries; and, of course, that it commands a daily exercise of unwearied patience, reciprocal forbearance and condescension, she will be soon disappointed in her fond expectation. Before the sacred and indissoluble engagement, the contracting parties see one another but at a distance, and one may say in full dress. Both of them were interested, and extremely careful to offer to view all that which they thought was capable of inspiring with esteem and love, and to hide all that which they feared might be an obstacle to their honest desires.

But when the ties cannot be broken off; when there is no longer any interest to disguise; when, as it is familiarly said, the honeymoon is over, and they see one another at each moment of the day; their natural temper, propensities, and inclinations which, without hypocrisy or voluntary deceit, they had kept under proper control and restraint, reappear without palliative, and such as in reality they are. The mask which covered them falling off, they discover in each other blemishes which, to their enchanted eyes, had been till then quite imperceptible; and both inwardly acknowledge that they have been in some degree mutually deceiving and deceived. But if truly virtuous, though they no longer see in the object of their actual possession, the exemption from defects and high perfections which they had admired in the object of their desires; yet that discovery will not alter the sentiments of esteem and connubial affection

which they feel for each other, because they are grounded upon essential and lasting good qualities. Entering into themselves, and looking around them, they will confess that we live in a region of human frailty; that every one has imperfections and failings; that the most perfect among mankind are not faultless; consequently they will acknowledge that they are themselves far from being perfect; that sometimes we are uneasy and discontented with ourselves, even without having it in our power to assign a positive cause for it, and while in such disposition, we cannot be otherwise than unpleasant to those about us. These reflections which their experience will dictate, will bring them down to a sense of their own imperfections; and thus they will feel the indispensable necessity of reciprocal forbearance and support; and that in order to secure their happiness, they must never allow small failings to dwell on their minds so much as to deface the whole of an amiable character. "Bear ye one another's burdens; and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2), is a precept of the apostle St. Paul, and of daily practice in a married state.

It is especially the wife, as being the weakest of the two, and in an habitual dependance on her husband, whom this precept regards. For one may say with too much truth, though it ought not to be so, that meekness, patience, condescension, forgiveness of wrongs, are almost always her exclusive lot. Pray, therefore, every day to God to grant you the grace of preserving, in the whole tenour of your conduct, a constant evenness of temper, and of passing over, without taking the slightest notice of them, those many little failings which are the appendages of our weak nature, and which, undoubtedly, you will now and then discover in your husband. Experience teaches that it is from trifling misunderstandings arising from the most frivolous causes that springs much of the

misery of social and domestic life. If through inadvertency some words, bordering upon bitterness or too much vivacity, were to escape you when conversing with your husband; as soon as you are sensible of what you have done, hasten to repair your fault with simplicity and candour, showing by your looks, the tone of your voice, and the sweetness of your expressions, that you are really sorry, and sincerely regret to have said something that has displeased him, or hurt his feelings. Supposing that he contradicts, reprehends, and treats you with injustice—beware not to indulge the first emotions of nature; do your utmost to stifle them. Place *a door of circumspection round about your lips*. By a short aspiration raise your heart to God, imploring his divine grace in the trying occurrence. Were you immediately, and when the mind is still agitated, to attempt to remonstrate against the offence or the injury offered, you would most probably go too far. Do not contend with him, and strive to make him acknowledge that he has been in the wrong. Mildness, silence, and prudent concessions, when compatible with truth and justice, are your only resources; whilst contention, too great eagerness and efforts to justify yourself at his expense, will irritate him the more, and enkindle and blow up the flames of domestic discord.

If you be thoroughly convinced that it is a strict and indispensable obligation for you to undeceive him; wait with patience till passion cool: as long as his imagination is in an uproar, the calm voice of reason will not be heard, self-love will shut up his eyes and ears, to the most solid arguments and unquestionable evidences, and will not suffer him to own that a woman, whom his wounded pride will make him judge so inferior to him, was in the right in opposing his sentiments. The more deeply he feels inwardly, that he has transgressed the

bounds of justice and moderation towards you—alas! such is the depravity of the human heart—the more eagerly he will endeavour, when urged by you to blame his proceedings, to find out excuses and justifications for what he has done or said, and which he might have condemned of his own accord, had he been left to himself and his own reflections. In short, it is more advisable either to drop entirely the subject, or to postpone bringing it again to his notice for weeks or months together, than to hazard the best remonstrances at an unseasonable time.

Never make use of recriminations, nor show by affected silence, gloomy looks, or dejected countenance, that a feeling of rancour is still lurking at the bottom of your heart. “Let not the sun go down upon your anger.”—Eph. iv. 26. On the contrary, redouble towards him testimonies of regard and love. Be ingenious by indirect ways to prove to him, that you are more inclined to excuse than to find him in fault; that you attribute all that which he may have done to a first impulse, and that he has lost nothing in the opinion you had of his noble, generous, and upright character. The more attentive and industrious he sees you are to reconcile him with himself, the better disposed he will be to repair his unwarrantable proceedings. “A soft tongue shall break darkness.”—Prov. xxv. 15. “A mild answer breaketh wrath, but a harsh word stirreth up fury.”—Prov. xv. 1. In effect, if we be for ever so little acquainted with the human heart, we shall acknowledge, that injuries done, are with more difficulty forgotten or forgiven, than injuries received. Nothing being more insupportable to a proud man than to be compelled to confess inwardly that he has degraded himself in his own eyes as well as in the sight of others. If these precautions be necessary in contests of real importance, you will easily conclude

how unreasonable and dangerous to the preservation of cordiality and union between you and your husband, it would be to maintain with stiffness and obstinacy your opinion in matters of indifference. To give up the point with sweetness and alacrity, in such occasions, is a strict duty incumbent upon you ; you will raise yourself higher in his judgment, by yielding with gentleness, than by defending the ground inch by inch, and by unanswerable arguments.

If, by her natural accomplishments, and acquired talents, a wife be really superior to her husband, which is sometimes the case ; she must be extremely careful not to let him feel his inferiority. She must never introduce into the conversation subjects on which he could not speak without betraying his incapacity or ignorance, but only those in which he can display his limited abilities to the best advantage ; showing that she is seeking and delighted to receive instructions from him, and not thinking herself capable of giving him any. When she is convinced that it is necessary to give him advice, and deter him from some undertaking which she foresees would be detrimental to his own interest and reputation, or to the welfare of her family, let her be cautious not to oppose his views with positiveness, but by gentle means let her try to insinuate herself into his confidence, by praising his intentions, and approving what may be truly laudable in his plan, how insignificant in itself the thing may be. Then let her, with the greatest modesty, hazard a few reflections only indicative of fears or doubts, respecting the success of his projects, and expressing at the same time the utmost regard and deference to the superiority of his understanding ; she might begin by saying, " My dear, most likely I am mistaken, for you are a more competent judge than me, but it seems to

me . . . perhaps it might be ” . . . Then make her observations with a tone of diffidence on herself, and willingness to yield. By such indirect and soft insinuations, she will spare the over delicacy of self-love and susceptibility of marital authority, and may succeed to bring him to her way of thinking. In this case, let her never give the least sign that it is to the solidity of her reasons that she attributes his change, but to him alone, thanking him for having solved her doubts and removed her fears by discovering and adopting of his own accord what was most eligible. Thus he will be induced to consult her in all his concerns, and will always receive her advice with kindness and gratitude. Let her be persuaded that the lower opinion of herself, and the greater deference to her husband she shows, the greater will her influence be over him. In fine, a wife ought to contend and strive for no other dominion, but the dominion of meekness, suavity, condescension, and engaging manners ; and for no other power, but the power of doing greater good, and by the continual practice of the most amiable virtues, contributing most to the stock of mutual happiness.

Besides overlooking the failings of her husband, a wife has another duty equally, nay even more indispensable to perform, viz., to correct her own defects, avoid with sedulous care whatever she has perceived to be offensive or displeasing to him in her conduct, and improve every day in the good qualities which she sees render her more amiable to him. She must never speak to him but with a smiling countenance and a sentiment of affection and love beaming in her looks. By taking upon herself the care of domestic concerns, and delivering him from the trouble of the interior management of the house, her constant attention must be to provide for him all the conveniences and comforts which

will make him find his home so pleasant an habitation as that he would never quit it without some pain, and always return to it with eagerness and pleasure, as to a place where he is sure to meet with a trusty and beloved friend anxious and happy to see him again, and in whose company he will enjoy all the sweets of the most tender friendship, and in whose heart he can pour forth his own with unreserved liberty and confidence.

Let never the least sign of being importuned appear in your countenance when you are interrupted by your husband in your spiritual exercises; do not make him wait for a minute, come at the first call, and let him read in your eyes the pleasure which you feel in complying readily with his wishes. As long as he seems pleased with your company do not show the least impatience or desire of shortening the conversation in order to return to your prayers. Remain with him, and do your best by your cheerfulness to convince him that you are never tired to be with him. Thus your meditations may be frequently interrupted, yet you will continue to pray; because you will continue to accomplish the will of God, "leaving God for God," as spiritual writers say. I cannot offer to you a better model to imitate than the conduct of St. Frances, as it is related in the *Lives of the Saints*, by Butler. "Her obedience," says the venerable and learned author, "and condescension to her husband was inimitable; which engaged such a return of affection, that for forty years they lived together, there never happened the least disagreement, and their whole life was a constant strife and emulation to prevent each other in mutual complaisance and respect. While she was at her prayers or other exercises, if called away by her husband, or the meanest person of her family, she laid all aside to obey without delay, saying, 'A married woman must, when called

upon, quit her devotions to God at the altar to find him in her household affairs.' God was pleased to show the merit of her obedience; for the authors of her life relate, that being called away four times in beginning the verse of a psalm in our Lady's office, returning the fifth time, she found that verse written in golden letters."

The married state requires greater virtues than it is generally thought. It demands such a union of hearts that for your spouse you should be ready to sacrifice whatever else is dear and valuable to you. "A man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh."—Matt. xix. 5. But this sincere affection for the creature must be accompanied with a predominant love for the Creator, and an inviolable fidelity to his divine commandments. Therefore, though at all times, in all circumstances, in spite of your repugnances, dislikes, labours, difficulties, and inclinations you ought always to be ready to overcome yourself, and yield with a sweet and generous compliance to the reasonable desires and requests of your husband, yet you must be armed with an undaunted courage and invincible fortitude to resist him, were he so unjust or blind as to require your approbation or acquiescence of maxims or actions forbidden by the law of God, or the precepts of the Church. The endeavours of a Christian wife to preserve the love of her husband, and maintain herself at the same time in the grace of God, are sometimes unavailing and attended with many perplexities and cruel vexations. For if she has the misfortune of being united to a man destitute of religious principles, she will be more than once under the necessity of not complying with his wishes, and thus she will incur his displeasure, and be exposed to upbraidings, harshness, and most severe privations. But she must be firmly resolved to bear them with patience,



rather than to be exempt from them by acting against the dictates of her conscience, and offending Almighty God by a criminal condescension. It is then for her the occasion to put in practice these Gospel maxims: "He that loveth father and mother . . . or a son or a daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. . . . He that shall lose his life for me, shall find it."—Matt. x. 37. In such trying circumstances she will be guided and supported by a supernatural grace, and she will experience in the consciousness of having done her duty, an inward peace and comfort which will assuage her pains, and in a great degree compensate her sacrifices. However unjustly treated she may be, she must never have recourse to reproaches or bitter words. After having done all she could possibly do consistently with her principles and obligations to please him, and sweetly represented to him that it is always a great happiness for her to enter into his views, and share his sentiments, and assured him that she most bitterly regrets not to have it in her power to satisfy him on the present occasion; she must remain in peace: an afflicted countenance, a few tears which even she must without affectation try to suppress, are the only arms left at her disposal. If the husband has constantly found his wife attentive to prevent his wishes, it is impossible that he would impute her non-compliance in a particular case, to any other motive than to religion, and notwithstanding his actual irritation he will soon be compelled to esteem her the more and vindicate her in his conscience.

Never entertain any correspondence or society with people against whom your husband may have some objection or dislike. His friends, whether they are agreeable to you or not, always receive with politeness and affability; but by a modest and unaffected reserve, keep them at a respectful distance from you, careful never to

form a particular intimacy with any one of them, avoiding with an equal attention prudery and familiarity. Your husband having lived from his youth in the gay world, and being of a lively and active disposition, you must not be surprised that notwithstanding his respect for religion he is not very exact in fulfilling its precepts ; you must consider as a particular happiness that he leaves you full liberty to follow your devotions. incessant prayer to Almighty God, and good example, are the best and the most effectual means, for the present, which you can employ to bring him to a sense of his duties. Preaching and long exhortations would fatigue and weary him out of his patience, while sweetness of temper, engaging manners, and the constant practice before him of every Christian and domestic virtue, would silently steel into his heart, and prepare him by insensible degrees to listen to the whisperings of his conscience, and to indirect hints and mild insinuations of friendship.

Do not take to heart the occasional absences of your husband. At his period of life, and having contracted the habit of mixing in the busy scenes of the world, you cannot expect that he will break up all at once with all his former acquaintances and inclinations, and that he will quietly set down by your side the greatest part of the day. Has he left you alone for a considerable time, and without having any solid cause to allege for his apparent indifference and neglect ? Beware of showing him at his return a gloomy and sad countenance, or reproaching him with a want of regard and love for you. On the contrary, give him a hearty and cheerful welcome. If he seem to be in good spirits, rejoice with him at the pleasant occurrences he has met with ; if grave and thoughtful, endeavour by gentle means, unaffected marks of tender sympathy, and that engaging and ex-

quisite sensibility with which an all-wise Providence has, for the best purposes, so eminently endowed your sex, to induce him to unburden to you the fulness of his heart, and by sharing in his painful feelings to alleviate and remove, if possible, the unusual cause of his seriousness, and make him find in the communications of a tender and reciprocal friendship, consolations which will make him forget the troubles and the vexations of the day. It is by using these innocent arts that a pious wife will preserve her husband's confidence and love, and that himself, in the midst of the various and delusive diversions of the world, will secretly long for his home, as a place where he can repose with comfort, peace, and security, and enjoy pure and unmingled delights.

I have discovered in you a disposition which, if confined within due bounds, is undoubtedly very laudable ; but, if carried to an excess, might become for you a source of continual uneasiness and anxiety, and at the end, of complete misery. I mean the fear of losing the affection of your husband. Next to God, you are bound to give him the whole possession of your heart, renounce every attachment, extinguish the smallest spark of affection for another man ; and it is natural that you should wish from him a similar return of love. But unless connubial affection be influenced and moderated by a spirit of religion, it is liable to degenerate into a mere profane sentiment almost always attended with jealousy. Were you to perceive in you the slightest symptom of that cruel and lamentable passion, you must not lose a moment to crush it in the bud. If you are so unfortunate as to give the least way to it, then the most ill-grounded fears and rash suspicions will get an almost irresistible ascendancy over all the faculties of your soul, and like a vulture prey on your inmost

vitals. Notwithstanding your efforts to hide your inward feelings, your amiable cheerfulness will soon be changed into a deep melancholy, and the sweetness of your temper into sourness and moroseness. The most innocent actions, words, or looks will appear to your prejudiced imagination as unequivocal evidences of guilt ; night and day you will be assailed and pursued by heart-breaking conjectures.

Instead of that happy union between you and your husband, grounded on mutual esteem and confidence, which gives such a relish to the labours and concerns of domestic life, you would be both in a perpetual constraint, and feel a sort of torture when obliged to see each other, either at your meals, or in company and other unavoidable family relations. The one from the apprehension of unmerited reproaches, the other from the exquisite humiliation and bitter regret of being forced to live in the society of the man whom she fancies has deserted her, and whom she still loves, but can no longer esteem. Hence it happens by a necessary consequence that the husband seeks elsewhere the peace and comforts which he cannot enjoy at home, and thus is induced to form connexions, of which at first he had not the least desire, and sometimes driven to excesses in order to obliterate from his mind his domestic broils and sorrows. This is not an exaggerated picture of the direful effects of jealousy ; those who have been acquainted with the affairs of families where that cruel passion has entered and reigns, can bear testimony that the distress and sufferings just described fall short of the reality. It is therefore of the highest importance for a wife of delicate and tender feelings, and who is very fond of her husband, to watch over her first emotions, and to keep her affectionate sentiments under the control of religion and moderation. Let her be

persuaded that if she has the misfortune of being united to an unfaithful husband, suspicions, reproaches, ill-humour, peevishness, will never reclaim him, and induce him to restore his affections to her. It is only from a continuance of good offices, forbearance, meekness, and unremitted efforts to please him, that she can entertain a hope of redress and consolation. Unless the husband be callous to every humane and generous feeling, sooner or later he will be ashamed of his misconduct or ingratitude. The patient indulgence, and unaltered kindness and delicate proceedings of his wife will revive his love for her, he will acknowledge his faults, and do his utmost to make amends for his past infidelities. If we can rely upon experience there is no doubt, that by adhering to such a line of conduct, a wife is almost assured of ultimate success. Give me leave on this occasion to translate a passage of a letter of St. Jerome to Læta. She was a daughter of a heathen father, whom his wife by her zeal, prudence, patience, and amiable virtues, had at length determined to embrace the Catholic faith. "It could not be otherwise," says the holy doctor, "the zeal of your mother for the salvation of the soul of her spouse, was necessarily to be attended and rewarded by that happy conversion. As for me," continues the same learned father, in his sublime and figurative style, "I think that that Jupiter himself to whom the heathens offered an idolatrous worship and adoration, would have believed in Jesus Christ, had he lived in so holy an alliance. *Ego puto, etiam ipsum Jovem, si habuisset talem cognationem, potuisse in Christum credere.*"

As for you, madam, I trust that the sentiments of solid and enlightened piety which animate you, will always be a sure preservative against the suggestions of jealousy, and that your husband will never give you any reason to suspect that his attachment for you has suf-

fered the slightest alteration, and therefore that you will never be under the hard necessity of putting in practice the advice which I have just given you. But as in this transitory life, the best tried virtues are not secure against the surprise of a moment, and the most deplorable falls—alas ! David, a man according to the heart of God, by yielding to an indiscreet curiosity, lost all command over himself, and was led to commit the crime of murder and adultery—I flatter myself that you will not be displeased at the reflections which I have presumed to lay before you.

In all domestic troubles and difficulties, a wife who is desirous never to deviate from the paths of virtue, and to preserve an unblemished character, must be extremely cautious about giving her confidence. Generally speaking, women are too lively, their imagination is too easily excited, their feelings are too warm, and they are thereby too apt to conceive prejudices, and partake the passions of those whom they love, to be capable of judging with coolness and impartiality ; and particularly in cases in which they think the honour and just rights of their sex are concerned, of pointing out to their friends the most prudent and advisable way of acting. As for men, she ought *never* on any pretence whatever, notwithstanding their reputation for uprightness, wisdom, or discretion, to choose among them a confidential friend, and communicate to him the sorrows of her heart, and her complaints against her husband ; she would find her ruin where she expected to derive advice, consolations, and support. I shall not speak here of the unfavourable reports to which she would be exposed by too frequent relations with a gentleman, and of the suspicions which may arise in her partner's mind. I shall willingly suppose that the public is quite ignorant of her conduct in the midst

of her family, and that the habitual visits of her confident, have the full approbation of her husband. I shall not insinuate that she may be deceived, and that the man to whom she intends to open her afflicted heart, may, under the garb of honesty, disinterestedness, and friendship, hide the most selfish and criminal views; that instead of using his influence to reconcile her with her husband, and encourage her to bear his wrongs with a mild resignation, he will either by exaggerating or artfully dwelling too long upon his misbehaviour, try to alienate entirely her affections from him, and gain them for himself. I shall grant that they are both actuated by the purest motives—that the intention of the one, is to get a support and guide in the hard and intricate difficulties in which she is involved, and that of the other is to administer assistance and comfort to a deserted and injured woman; yet, under all these auspicious suppositions, I still maintain that she is strictly obliged to shun such intimate communications. The more virtuous she is, the greater reason has she to distrust herself, and to take the severest precautions, otherwise her innocence and good intentions might not prevent her from falling into the most dangerous illusion. At first she will feel only a sentiment of gratitude for the tender concern and sympathy she has met with in her affliction; the modest reserve of her adviser, the wisdom of his counsels, the piety of his observations, will banish from her mind all doubts or suspicions. But perhaps it will be said, what peril can she run in entertaining a connexion established upon probity, religion, acknowledged merit, and from which she derives so much benefit? Yet I repeat it, and would to God that this assertion were not grounded upon too frequent and unquestionable evidences! Yes, there is danger and an imminent one. For, from esteem and

gratitude, there is but one step to friendship; and between two persons of different sex, though both virtuous, friendship is too often a soft and sacred name given to an affection to which the senses are not quite strangers. I shall add an observation confirmed by experience, viz., that there would be less inconvenience and danger with a man known to be of an equivocal character and loose morals and principles. A virtuous woman would be upon her guard with him, disbelieve his fair protestations and pretended zeal, and reject his assistance. But with regard to the man whom she esteems because he is truly estimable, she has no fear. She implicitly believes all he says: his attentions imperceptibly make a deep impression upon her heart; her attachment grows stronger and stronger every day; precautions are little by little laid aside; the retrospect of the days passed without having indulged the least want of decorum and propriety, inspires her with a presumptuous confidence in her own strength. Each moment brings her nearer the brink of the precipice; and as the advances towards it are gradual, and as it were, inch by inch, they are not perceived, and with a real horror of vice in the heart, the language of virtue on the lips, and a sincere respect for its precepts, an insignificant indiscretion, a slight complaisance, a sudden and unforeseen occurrence, a motion of sensibility, the surprise of a moment will blind her eyes, obscure her understanding, bewilder her steps, stifle the voice of her conscience, and cause, but too late, the most acute remorse, and make her deplore with bitter and unavailing tears, the fatal consequences of her imprudence and false security. Therefore in domestic afflictions a married woman, should have no other friend, no other confident and comforter than Jesus Christ. It is to him alone that she can with perfect safety discover the



wounds of her bleeding heart. It is at the feet of his cross, that she must implore the courage, patience, and resignation she stands in need of. It is there that she will "obtain mercy, and find grace in a seasonable aid." Heb. iv. 16. "Come to me all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (Matt. xi. 28), says our divine Saviour. In all the disappointments, cares, and adversities of this life, to trust upon the creature, is to lean upon a weak and sharp reed, which, whenever we lay hold of it to support ourselves, breaks and pierces the hand.

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### XIII.

#### ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

Although I am persuaded that you will find in the short and admirable treatise on the education of a daughter by the immortal Fenelon, all that you can wish to guide you in the education of your amiable little girl; yet since you are so urgent in your request to know my ideas on this important subject, I shall communicate them to you with simplicity, at the risk of telling you what most probably you already know. I shall content myself with laying down general principles which you may apply to circumstances, as occasionally they may occur.

The education of children begins in their cradle, the first lessons which they receive, are at their mother's breast. Before they are capable of having masters or mistresses, they derive instructions from all the objects which surround them; they have piercing eyes which few things escape; they observe, with a penetration and sagacity of which they are seldom suspected, all that which they see or hear. Before they can lisp a few

words they have already acquired several notions of things. These first and dumb lessons make so much deeper impression upon them, and are so much the more quickly engraved in their minds, that, without the constraint of a close application, and any labour on their side, they are repeated every day, at every hour, at every instant of the day, and insinuated into their souls through all their senses.

Now as it is demonstrated by daily experience, that children contract more easily the moral habits of their mothers, nurses or attendants, than they can catch their corporal diseases, it is of the highest importance to present to them only such objects as can direct to the practice of virtue their first ideas and affections. Hence that saying of profound wisdom of an ancient heathen author, *Magna debetur puero reverentia*—"The greatest respect is due to children." That is to say, that one ought not to do any thing in their presence, or to say the least word in their hearing, which might have a tendency to perplex or pervert their still uninformed minds, and corrupt their morals. You ought therefore to consider it one of your indispensable duties, to watch with sedulous care, and a truly maternal and Christian solicitude over the first dawns of the reason, and the manifestation of the natural propensities and rising passions of your daughter, without expressing the least admiration at her quick and witty repartees, or surprise, impatience, or discontent at her mistakes or wrong notions.

We read in the Gospel that our Blessed Lady hearing of the wisdom which our divine Saviour, when twelve years old, had displayed by his answers to the doctors of the law, "kept all these words in her heart."—Luke ii. 46. Do the same. When you perceive the promising mental as well as corporal accomplishments of your

daughter, endeavour to keep within your heart the sentiments of joy which it is both natural and just for you to feel. Improve with a skilful hand her good dispositions for her eternal happiness, and with unwearied patience and mildness apply yourself to correct her defects. In order to succeed in this undertaking, on which your own happiness, as well as that of your beloved child depends, do not imagine that you will be doomed to a perpetual constraint, and extraordinary and painful efforts. By no means : you have only to continue to be in her presence, what you are, and should be, were you to be without children, viz., modest, amiable, good-tempered and pious. Thus without preaching, without reproofs, you will sow in her young and tender heart, the seeds of every virtue, which growing up as she advances in years, will produce the sweetest blossoms, and bring forth the most abundant and delicious fruit in their proper season. When she will behold her affectionate mother fulfilling her religious and domestic duties with exactitude and cheerfulness, her attention to avoid idleness, and employ all her leisure moments in some useful occupation. The little girl will be led insensibly to love piety, and of her own accord to do some little work as her age will permit. When she sees her mamma beginning and finishing the day, by falling upon her knees, and pouring forth with an humble and fervent countenance, the desires and thanksgivings of a grateful and pious heart, it will not be necessary to make use of compulsion to make her say her morning and night prayers, she will beg of her to teach her what she says, kneel by her side, try to repeat the same words, lift up her little hands towards heaven, and offer the first homage of her innocent heart to that invisible and beneficent Being whom her mamma seems to venerate and love so much.

Thus she will be sweetly induced to ask to be taught the first elements of our religion, and will learn to perform with pleasure some of its duties, even before she can fully comprehend their necessity and advantage. During his abode in Paris, the writer of these letters was the confessor of a young foreign lady, lately converted to the Catholic faith; she had two daughters about six or seven years old, but who had not as yet received much religious instruction. They were both very fond of their mother, doing their little best to imitate her in every thing, and she on her side loved them most tenderly. She fell ill and sent for her confessor. As she was extremely weak, and could not go to the parish church, he had obtained leave to communicate her in her apartment. At the moment of the communion, the two sweet little girls dressed in a white frock holding wax candles in their hands, and kneeling at each side of their mother, seemed during the whole sacred ceremony to partake the sentiments of humility, compunction, adoration, and love which penetrated her soul and animated her countenance. They looked like those little angels that are represented by painters, adoring with ecstatic feelings the blessed sacrament. The writer is persuaded that the pious impression which they received at that moment, will never be obliterated from their minds; and though it was not intended, that it was an efficacious means to convey to their understanding proper notions of the holy dispositions which they would have one day to bring to communion.

You must accustom your daughter from her most tender years to have her heart always upon her lips with you, listening with maternal indulgence to her little observations, answering her questions with truth; for you must be persuaded that you can never deceive her with

safety. Confine yourself to explain to her with simplicity what she can understand, postponing with great mildness, to another time, the explanation of the things which you judge to be above her actual capacity, and which might be inconvenient for her to know at her age. In proportion as her intelligence is more extended, if you have been careful, by gentle and unaffected remarks, to make her sensible that the very things which she comprehends with the greatest ease and pleasure were unintelligible to her two or three years before, she will not wonder at your telling her, that you cannot answer her question for the present without puzzling her mind, on account of her youth; but that in a short time hence, when she is a little older, you will satisfy her natural and laudable curiosity. She will remain quiet, without seeking with eagerness to know more than you tell her. Were you to use deception with her, and were she to discover it, which may happen, notwithstanding all your precautions, you will lose her confidence for ever; you will set her imagination at work, and make her suspect that there is always something mysterious in your plainest and most candid answers.

When she is at play, do not lose sight of her; unless she does something unbecoming, or which might hurt her, do not appear to take the least notice of her actions; let her enjoy her innocent and childish amusements with full liberty. Thus you will have the best means to know her true character. Listen with attention to the speeches which she addresses to her doll, you will learn by the praises or reproofs which she gives, the notions which she has formed of right and wrong, of impropriety and decorum, and the practical conclusions which she has drawn from the instructions which she has received, and the particular observations which she may have made herself. You will be surprised at the acuteness of

her remarks, and that none of the things done before her has passed unnoticed.

A vice which you must be extremely careful to prevent or to eradicate from your daughter's heart, were you to discover in her the least signs of it, is Vanity. Women are born with an innate, and one might perhaps say, with an almost irresistible desire of pleasing and rendering themselves agreeable to others. When confined within the bounds which both reason and religion allow, there is nothing reprehensible in this natural disposition; because it is not by authority, or a stern countenance, that they can exercise in the bosom of their families that useful influence to which they are called by an all-wise Providence, but by gentleness, amiability, and sweetness of manners. Therefore, as Fenelon says, "there is no sin, nor imperfection in consulting neatness, proportions, and taste in the different articles of dress." And a woman with a sincere love of virtue may wish, nay is authorized, to try to render it amiable in her person. When your daughter is of an age to profit of the advice, tell her, Dress yourself so as not to pass in the eyes of the world as a slovenly person, without taste; but let no affectation, no fondness of pomp or show, ever appear in your exterior and in your carriage; thus you will prove that you are possessed with reason and virtue far superior to your dress. But as nothing is so easy as to be deluded upon this point, and under specious motives to be really actuated by a secret self-love and pride; a mother who is jealous of the happiness and salvation of her daughter, cannot too soon inspire her with contempt for all vain exterior endowments, and all sorts of research in dress. In her very infancy, she must habituate her to be particularly modest; it is a point to which many mothers and governesses often pay very little attention, and for which, however, they may be more responsible

than they think, before the sovereign Judge. Let them seriously reflect upon this awful sentence of our divine Lord: "It were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck, and be cast into the sea, than that he should scandalize one of these little ones."—Luke xvii. 2.

Let your daughter's dress be always neat, but plain, never promise, and give her as a reward, a finer frock or gown than usual, or punish her for the faults which she may commit, by obliging her to put on one more common or of a coarser stuff; that would induce her to consider brilliant clothes as a sign of merit, and mean ones as a mark of defects or low sentiments, and thus indirectly teach her to attach a great value to refinements of dress, and outward ornaments, to which females are too prone, and inspire her with a sort of disdain for the poor and destitute. Do not praise in her presence the elegant attire or the beauty of the ladies and little girls who may chance to visit you. Beware still more of telling her, or saying in her hearing, that she is very pretty; she will learn it soon enough, without your taking the trouble to inform her of it. Although born in affluence, yet habituate her betimes to work. As soon as her little fingers are able to hold a needle, teach her to make use of it. But do not impose it upon her as a task, and still less as a punishment. Your example upon this, as upon any other subject, must be her first lesson. Imitation being the constant occupation of children, without being urged to do it, they will of their own accord seek to imitate what they see their parents doing. Hence the strict and indispensable obligation for parents, never to do any thing in the presence of their children, but what may tend to the improvement of their morals. Remember that your life is a book in which your little girl reads every day, and from the reading of which she ought to

derive the love of the virtues, which can secure to her the testimony of an irreproachable conscience, the esteem of men of worth, and above all, the approbation of God.

According to the progressive improvement of your daughter's mental faculties, proportion your instructions. Be always ready to give her solid reasons for what you require from her. Reflect before you enjoin or forbid : but when you have pronounced, let no importunities, crossness, tears, or entreaties, induce you to alter your decision. Be immovable. Do not show impatience or anger, nor use harsh words ; but a calm, cool, serious, and unshaken firmness. To have no indulgence for the levity, thoughtlessness, and little sallies so natural to children ; to make no allowance for want of judgment and experience, would be equally unreasonable and cruel in parents. When, through a blind and inexcusable affection, they comply with their humour or caprice, yield to their obstinacy or impatience, and wink at their rising passions, that infatuated love does them greater injury than indifference or ill-treatment ; parents are therefore obliged to correct their children when necessary. "He that spareth the rod, hateth his son : but he that loveth him, correcteth him betimes."—Prov. xiii. 24. But let them never inflict any punishment in a fit of passion, lest they should exceed the bounds of justice and moderation. Let them also reflect that correction may prevent external actions, but it does not always change the heart ; consequently that they should not employ it but after all other means have been exhausted, and proved abortive. But when they have recourse to reproofs or punishments, they must endeavour by solid arguments to convince the guilty how much they have deserved them ; that it is with repugnance, and a real affliction they are compelled to apply such a remedy ; that instead of being actuated by resentment or dislike, they are guided by the most



sincere affection for them, and that in overcoming on the present occasion their tender feelings, and their constant desire of sparing them every sort of grief or pain, they have nothing in view but their actual and future happiness. Be persuaded that children who, from the first use of reason, have been witnesses of the kindness, moderation, and benevolence of their parents towards them, and who daily receive the most unequivocal proofs of their love, and of their readiness to procure them all the innocent pleasures and enjoyments of their age, will, when the first emotions of self-love and pride have subsided, be the first to condemn themselves in the secret of their heart, feel a sincere regret for what they have done, bear the reprimand with humility, and take a firm resolution of amendment.

If Almighty God be pleased to bless you with several children, imprint deeply in your mind, that notwithstanding the variety of characters, and inequality of natural accomplishments and dispositions, they are all equally entitled to the same tenderness, attention, and care. Though you feel yourself involuntarily more attracted to the one than to the others, on account of its sweeter temper and more engaging manners, beware not to show the least preference or partiality. For, were you to give way to your inclination, the object of your predilection would become immediately an object of jealousy. Hence would arise in the bosom of your family an inexhaustible source of animosity, broils, division, and discord. Remember the history of Joseph. "Now Israel loved Joseph above all his sons, because he had him in his old age: and he made him a coat of divers colours, and his brethren seeing that he was loved by his father, more than all his sons, hated him, and could not peaceably speak to him."—Gen. xxxvii. 3, 4. The partiality of parents towards some of their children, is not always attended

with the lamentable consequences related in the history of Joseph ; but it never fails to create antipathies, dislike, and rancour between brothers and sisters, which frequently last for ever, and render inveterate enemies those who were by nature and religion called to love one another, and be a reciprocal help in the difficulties and unavoidable afflictions of this transitory life. Moreover the principles of reason as well as of religion, recommend to parents not to let themselves be influenced by their feelings. If they would but lay them aside, they would soon be convinced that those of their children who have fewer accomplishments either of mind or body, are not on that account to be neglected, but on the contrary, have the strongest claims to their solicitude, indulgence, and tenderness.

The circumstances in which you are placed, not allowing you to have your daughter always under your immediate inspection, it is essential for your tranquillity and her good, that her governess and your waiting maid, should most sincerely enter into your views ; otherwise, you will be exposed to lose the fruit of your pious example and wise and prudent precautions. But you will tell me, Where shall I find women capable of following the rules which you have pointed out to me ? I own that it is rather difficult ; yet, if you pray earnestly to God to direct your choice, and if you are thoroughly convinced that you cannot pay too dear the services of a person of real merit, and to whom you may, during your momentary absences, intrust with confidence and perfect security the care of your daughter, I hope that you will not seek in vain. Consider, that it is not an accomplished governess according to the ideas of the world, that is to say, a fine lady, conversant with foreign languages, a perfect mistress of music, drawing, literature, fine arts, &c. &c., whom I recommend you to

look for ; but a woman who has a polite and solid education, a woman of good sense, animated with a true fear and love of God, of an accommodating temper, of sweet and genteel manners, and capable of teaching her pupil the first elements of religion, and the duties of a young person, destined by her rank and fortune to live in the high world. If you be so happy as to meet with a governess of this description, you must offer up to God your most grateful thanksgivings for having procured you such a precious treasure. Do not treat her as a servant, but as a friend. Communicate to her your plan and observations ; listen to hers with kindness. The essential for the success of your daughter's education is, that her governess and you should have one and the same mind, follow the same paths, adhere to the same principles, and give always the same advice, so that she may not discover the least difference in the instructions and example of her governess, from those she has received from yourself. In short, it is desirable that she should, in every respect, find in her a second mother.

I shall not enter into further details with regard to the education of your daughter ; all I could tell you upon this important subject, you will find most clearly explained in Fenelon's treatise, which I have already mentioned to you, and much better than I could ever do. I advise you, therefore, to read it with her governess, and to follow, as exactly as possible, the rules which he gives. I shall only add some observations, which reflection and experience have suggested to me. When your little girl is able to hold a needle, accustom her to make use of it, not only to dress and adorn her doll, but also for some profitable purpose. Do no set her to work as a task, and still less as a penance ; that would inspire her with disgust for it, and cause her to give it up as soon as she

could, without fear of being chid. As she sees you as well as herself surrounded with all the conveniences and comforts of life, in vain you would tell her that working is an obligation imposed upon all men, and those who to-day are in the greatest affluence, may be to-morrow, by unforeseen and irreparable occurrences, thrown into the utmost misery ; she would not understand or believe you. To hold her such a discourse, you must wait till she is more advanced in years, and capable of taking an interest in the history of human miseries. Yet, in the mean while, you may without affectation give a moral turn to her occupations and amusements.

When you take a walk in the fields around your country seat, you may, as by chance, and to make her take a little rest, enter into some poor cottage, and showing her little girls, almost naked, and shivering with cold, tell her with a tone of sensibility and compassion, what a pity that I did not know the distress of this family ! I should have immediately set my hands to work to give them some clothes ; as soon as we return home I will not fail to do it. You, my sweet child, who are already so clever in making gowns, caps, &c. &c. for your doll, that is only a piece of pasteboard, that feels neither cold nor heat, could you not help me ? These poor helpless children would bless you. Then change the conversation, continue your walk, speaking of other things. At your return home, fulfil your intention, without saying one single word to invite her to join you. And were she to offer it of her own accord, which certainly will be the case, do not accept her proposal all at once ; adding, that perhaps she would not like it—would be too much for her, and would be tired ; or such dilatory answers. There is no doubt that she will be thereby more earnest in her request. Thus, without preaching, without the dryness of a formal instruction, you will give her a

lesson of charity which she will never forget. It is by such indirect ways and innocent artifice, that a wise and pious mother can implant in the hearts of her children the principles of all Christian virtues, which, being unfolded and confirmed by solid instructions at a more advanced period of life, will influence and guide their conduct to their own great advantage and that of society.

Without showing that you wish to enjoy the confidence of your daughter, do your best to gain it. For this purpose, leave her in the greatest liberty with you. Let her speak her mind to you without restraint. Gratify, with readiness, all her inclinations, when it can be done without injury either to her morals or to her health. Be not hasty to reprehend her, because it is very important that you should know her propensities and defects without palliative, such as they are ; a knowledge which you would never obtain were she to meet with a reproof at every failing ; she would shut up her heart, assume a counterfeit countenance, and affect sentiments quite opposite to her own ; and thus you will know very imperfectly what is to be corrected in her. When physicians prescribe to a sick man to take a bitter pill, they recommend always to wrap it up in honey or sweetmeats, in order to make it palatable. It ought to be so with regard to correction ; it must always be administered with prudence, management, and sweetness.

When your daughter is capable of receiving more extensive instructions upon religion, do it with zeal, but with such sobriety, as to leave her with a desire of learning more than she has heard, and confining yourself to things essential, well proved, and of daily practice. A pious mother, guided by the purest motives, is sometimes eager that her daughter should address herself to her own confessor, thinking that she would thereby do her the greatest good. That in some peculiar and

rare circumstances it may have been so, I shall not call in question. Yet I must without disguise tell you, that experience has too often proved that there is a great imprudence in a mother to express such a desire; because it is indirectly depriving her daughter from that liberty of conscience so indispensable to reap fruit from the sacrament of penance. As long as a child is incapable, or a young person has not the opportunity of choosing for herself, it is certainly right for the mother to make the choice. But were she to live in a town where there are several priests, I should advise her to give to her daughter another confessor than her own. If the scarcity of priests, or the circumstances of her situation; for example, if she reside in a country place where there is only the missionary who has the care of the congregation, there is no alternative, both mother and daughter must go to the same confessor. I shall only observe, that the mother must speak of the reverend gentleman in the presence of her daughter, with the greatest prudence and precaution. 1. If he has some little defects or imperfections, never to allude to them in conversation, but to give, without affectation, a favourable interpretation to his words and actions. 2. If he be a man of rare merit, to do him full justice, and praise his eminent virtues or talents, but in moderate terms, avoiding those highflown and emphatic expressions, which devout women are too apt to make use of when they speak of their director, as if he were the only priest capable of guiding souls in the ways of perfection. These hyperbolic encomiums generally do more harm than good, because they are always suspected of great exaggeration, and render people more sharpsighted to discover little blemishes, which otherwise would have remained unperceived.

A mother should be particularly attentive never to

threaten her daughter that she will inform her confessor of her faults or defects. Such an indiscreet threat would inspire her with distrust, prevent her from opening her conscience to him with simplicity and candour, and destroy, in great part, the good effects of wise remonstrances ; because she will imagine that he has been beforehand prejudiced against her. It is a very essential point for children, and also for adult people, to have a thorough conviction, that their confessor is a most sincere and trusty friend, just, impartial, influenced by no one in the decisions or advice which he gives ; more inclined to excuse their faults with indulgence, than to judge them with severity ; and has, and cannot have, any other view but their temporal as well as spiritual happiness. When your daughter is sufficiently instructed, leave her at full liberty to address herself to whomsoever she prefers, unless you have the most unquestionable proofs that her choice has fallen upon a person justly suspected of erroneous doctrine, or relaxed principles of morality.

Try to find out some young persons of her age, of an amiable carriage and pure morals, with whom she can associate, and in whose company she can recreate and amuse herself at home ; and thus preserve her from the desire or temptation of seeking after greater enjoyments elsewhere. As for the books of history and literature to be put into her hands, you must use great wisdom and discretion, never giving her any, either in a foreign idiom, or in English, before you have read them yourself. Habituate her betimes to prefer histories grounded upon real facts, to those imaginary tales, and nonsensical stories with which the minds of girls are too often filled up. Ask her in a sweet manner and by way of conversation, to give you an account of what she has read, and the reflections which she has made ; that will accustom her to read with attention, contribute to form her

judgment, and afford you an opportunity of correcting the mistakes into which she may occasionally fall. But remember that this should never be done in the form of a lesson, nor ought she to be reprehended for the erroneous conclusions she may have drawn from the events or the characters of persons; but gently and amicably be taught to see them in a proper light and appreciate them as they deserve. "Youth in general," says Fenelon, "but young women in particular, are apt to have roving imaginations. From a want of a substantial aliment, their curiosity feeds eagerly on vain and dangerous objects. Such as are possessed of talents set themselves up for critics, and devour every publication that can tend to nourish their vanity. They are passionately fond of romances, comedies, and novels, which silently instil into their unguarded breasts the poison of profane love. These baneful productions fill their minds with chimerical ideas, habituate them to the bombast language of imaginary heroes, and thus spoil them for conversing with the world: for all those fine and visionary sentiments, those generous attachments, and marvellous adventures, invented by interested novel-writers to please their light readers, have no relation whatever with the springs and motives of our actions, nor with the untoward circumstances, that pressing upon us, are so apt to disconcert the various concerns of life.

"A poor girl bewitched by the tender and marvellous sentiments with which she has been impressed by the reading of novels, is all astonishment, when she looks around in real life, and cannot discover a single person throughout the world bearing resemblance with their ideal hero. She would fain live like those imaginary princesses of whom she has read, always charming, always adored, and a stranger to every kind of want. How disgusting must it then be for her to descend from



this heroic state, to stoop to what she considers the drudgery of a family.”—Fen. Edu. Transl. of R. M. Rayment.

In fine, the end of which you should never lose sight in the education of your daughter, is that your endeavours must not be directed to make of her an accomplished lady, according to the notions of the world, a virtuoso, or an elegant writer; but a woman of good sense, of solid piety, an amiable wife, a tender and affectionate mother, a good mistress, who, by the affability and propriety of her whole conduct, and the practice of all Christian virtues, will be the honour of her sex and the comfort of her family.

It will be objected that such a continual application to watch over the rising inclinations of her daughter, to guide all her steps, in order to guard and caution her against dangers to which she will perhaps never be exposed, is condemning the mother to a subjection wholly incompatible with those *social* duties, from which a lady living in the world cannot be dispensed with. If, under the name of *social* duties, one understands passing several hours at her *toilet*, useless visits, shopping, frequenting the theatre, balls, public concerts, routes, tea-parties, or *soirées*, prolonged to the middle of the night, I candidly own that the line of conduct just pointed out is entirely irreconcilable with those pretended duties. But ought maternal obligations so forcibly enjoined by nature, reason, and the Gospel, to be sacrificed at the shrine of worldly wisdom and opinions? Is it to idle away her time in such vain, frivolous, and dangerous occupations that a woman has been married and blessed with children? You have too much good sense and religion not to see all at once the glaring inconsistency of such pretences, and I am persuaded that they will never have any influence on your mind. Believe me, you will experience, in the faithful discharge of these maternal

cares, pleasures and comforts a thousand times preferable to all the enjoyments which a worldly life can afford.

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#### XIV.

##### DUTIES OF MASTERS TOWARDS THEIR SERVANTS.

Next to the duties of parents with regard to their children, there are few others more forcibly and oftener recommended in the Holy Scriptures than those of masters and mistresses towards their servants. "If any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."—1 Tim. v. 8. How few Christians there are who seriously meditate on this maxim of the great apostle, and make it the rule of their conduct in the government of their house! We are so naturally inclined to pride and to estimate ourselves and others by the more or less splendour with which we are respectively surrounded, that we are liable in practice to consider ourselves as beings of a superior nature, when we inhabit a fine house, are clothed with rich garments, and attended by a great number of servants, and from these so ill-grounded and silly notions we are prone to look down upon those who, on account of their low birth or narrow circumstances, are doomed to work and serve, as if they were born to comply with all our commands, gratify all our whims; in short, as instruments appointed by Divine Providence to afford us all the conveniences and sweets of life, and very much honoured and happy that we vouchsafe to accept of their services; whilst on our side, we owe them almost nothing, except a salary which we try shall be as small as possible, than which nothing is more

contrary to the principles of solid reason, humanity, and religion. In effect, our divine Saviour proposing himself as our model, said, "The Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister."—Matt. xx. 28. Hence he taught us that nothing is more truly great than to be useful and serviceable to others, without being in need of their assistance, according to this other maxim, "It is a more blessed thing to give rather than to receive."—Acts xx. 35. Therefore a mistress animated with the spirit of Jesus Christ, though she may be of noble parentage and in the greatest affluence, should look upon herself as the lowest in her family, since by circumstances, she is far remote from the poverty and humility of this most adorable Saviour ; and besides as strictly bound to *minister*, according to their respective wants and situation, *unto* all those who are her dependants and attendants. For, without doubt, true grandeur consists in resembling, as near as possible, a God-man.

Were we to judge of things with impartiality, and in the silence of the passions, perhaps we might be induced to doubt if masters and mistresses be not more indebted to their servants, than their servants to them. But without entering into that nice discussion, one can say that it is an incontrovertible truth, that to govern a family with wisdom, is not so easy a task as it is commonly believed, and that the exercise of authority over other people, on account of the awful responsibility attached to it, is attended with real dangers. That servants are obliged to obey their masters, I confess, "not serving to the eye, as if it were pleasing men ; but as the servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart. But you masters do the same things to them, forbearing threatenings, knowing that the Lord both of them and you is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with

him."—Eph. vi. 6—8. To him a strict account masters will have one day to render, for whatever they may have commanded, forbidden, and permitted to their servants. All that which they may have learned from their discourses or examples, all the occasions of sin which they have given them, all the opportunities of practising virtue they have withheld from them, their ignorance or neglect of their religious duties ; all the defects or vices which they have not endeavoured to correct, will be imputed to them. Our servants are our brothers or sisters ; we have been all formed with the same clay, we are all born of the same father ; they are like us redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ, by the sacrament of Baptism ; they are become the children of God, and are as ourselves called to the same heavenly inheritance. We ought to consider them as sacred deposits committed to our care by the orders of Divine Providence. We are united to them by the bands of an intimate society ; we have reciprocal duties to accomplish. If by their work and attendance they are obliged to contribute to our help and comfort, we owe them in return for their services not only a corporal sustenance and salary, but also kindness and instruction. We should leave nothing undone which may promote their advancement in virtue, and procure them the means of securing to themselves the possession of imperishable blessings ; which, alas ! so very seldom they think of.

From these premises you will easily conclude how cautious you must be in the choice of your servants, and how attentive to watch over them, to preserve the purity of their religious and moral principles, and render their dependant condition a sweet yoke, and a light burden. The choice of your men-servants belonging to your husband, I shall content myself with pointing out to you

the rule of conduct which you ought to follow respecting your female servants. In many circumstances it may be applicable to the other sex.

I am very glad that your Protestant waiting-maid has left you on her own accord, expressing a sincere regret of being under the necessity of parting with you. It does honour to both. I very much approve of the handsome present which you have made her—it is an act of justice, and a very well-employed generosity. Since she had served you with fidelity, she was entitled to a reward. It will besides leave her a good and right impression of Catholic principles, seeing that your change of religion has not altered your noble and generous disposition. You have done well to choose a Catholic woman to supply her place. If she be not so clever as the other, provided she is of an even temper, sound morals, pious, modest, docile, and willing to learn, all the rest is of very little importance. As your ordinary place of residence is a Protestant country, I advise you always to have a Catholic woman for your immediate attendant; she will be of almost an indispensable service to you, either to accompany you when you go to church, read pious books to you by your bedside in case of sickness, and in the presence of whom you can at all times follow your habitual practices of piety. She may also supply you now and then, and stay with your daughter during the momentary absence of her governess. I cannot coincide with your idea of having a young girl to attend her in quality of a waiting-maid. There is always a great inconvenience in a greater number of servants than necessity commands. Those who have but one or two are better served than those who have twenty. Most ladies of fortune, have very different ideas; they have never reflected that the precept of St. Paul, “If any man will not work neither let him eat” (2 Thess.

iii. 10), concerns them as well as the rest of their fellow-creatures. If they are not compelled to labour hard, in order to procure to themselves the necessities of life, they are not for that dispensed with from working, or allowed to pass the whole day in idleness, without doing the least thing for themselves—be not seduced by their example. Do for yourself all that you can do, with regard to dressing or undressing yourself, and many other little services about your person, and make no use of your waiting-maid, but in case of real utility or of sickness. Accustom your daughter to do the same, and not to have always at her beck a servant to dispense her from making use of her hands. Thus you will guard her against sloth and vanity, and render her more independent and happy. I do not mention here the increase of expense occasioned by an unnecessary number of servants. For if we have superfluity, it might, and ought to be better employed than in keeping a large and useless establishment, from which nothing can be derived but food for self-complacency and pride.

I have had occasion to observe that in some Catholic families of affluence, there were more Protestant than Catholic servants; although it is a fact too well ascertained, that there are many poor Catholics of either sex who have the greatest difficulty to find a situation, and who are compelled from necessity to enter into the service of Protestant masters, to the great danger of their salvation. How the rich Catholics can justify such an indifference respecting their fellow members of the same holy church, I really am at a loss to discover. It seems to betray, if not a total want of faith, at least very imperfect notions, or a gross ignorance of the duties it prescribes. “Whilst we have time, let us work good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”—Gal. vi. 10.

Were we to examine the secret motives of most masters in the choice of a servant, we should discover to their shame, that they very seldom inquire whether he is solidly virtuous, but only if he have the qualifications the best adapted to their worldly views; if to them it can be assured that he is not a thief or a drunkard, they do not carry their inquiries any further; they are perfectly satisfied. What are his sentiments about religion, and even if he has any religion at all, they do not care. Hence a lady who wants a waiting-maid, is very solicitous to know if she be very skilful in making dresses according to the fashion of the day, if she curl her hair with great elegance. If she possess these *essential* talents, whatever may be her creed, she will be preferred before her Catholic competitor, who is inferior to her in this respect, though much superior in mental and religious endowments. Do not infer from this reflection that you ought to use your influence on your husband to induce him to dismiss all his Protestant servants. By no means; I give you no such advice. If they discharge their duties with exactness and fidelity, and if they be of irreproachable manners, he may keep them. It would be doing an injury to our religion to send them away merely because they are Protestants; we should most sincerely wish to see those who are dependant upon us, returning to the sheepfold, and to the guidance of the divine Shepherd, but when their behaviour is blameless, they are not to be punished for the misfortune of being born in error. Moreover by receiving good examples in your house, most of their prejudices against the Catholic faith will be gradually removed, doubts about the religion in which they have been brought up may insensibly arise in their mind, and lead them to desire to be instructed. In which case they should be encouraged, and all the means of knowing the truth be

furnished to them, such as good books, and verbal instructions, if they testify some wish for them. But let *never* any human motives, such as higher wages, protection to their friends, &c. &c., be suggested to them as an inducement to return to the bosom of the Catholic Church. That would expose them to the temptation of acting with selfishness and hypocrisy in an affair in which they should have nothing in view but their eternal salvation. The only interference which you can use with propriety, nay which you are obliged to employ, is to engage your husband never to take or keep any servants destitute of religion, or of loose morals. Although they may be clever, punctual, intelligent, polite and agreeable in service, they will ultimately prove bad servants, and be the cause of many disorders in a family.

It would be a very useful and commendable expense, to buy sets of amusing and instructive books, to be left at the disposal of, or be lent to your servants, that they may have something to occupy them when waiting in the antechamber; that will prevent improper conversations, and *idleness* which, as the Scripture says, "hath taught much evil" (Eccl. xxxiii. 29), and contribute to their improvement in virtue. As for plays, novels, or books upon politics, they must be severely excluded.

There is no human being exempt from defects, therefore you must expect to find some in the women who serve you. Your indispensable duty as their mistress, is to do your best, with mildness and patience, to correct them. If we who have had at our disposal so many means of instruction and improvement, still feel so much difficulty in mending what is defective in us, ought we to wonder if our servants who are born in a state of poverty, and have received but a very limited education, cannot be in one day made such as we wish them to be,



and notwithstanding our care preserve many little imperfections. Before you undertake to correct, remember that you must have prepared the heart for the correction ; for amendment cannot be operated without persuasion, which can never be obtained but by gaining the heart already well disposed by previous good offices, and real marks of interest and affection. If your servants daily experience that you love them, enter cordially into their wants, and that it is a pleasure for you to oblige them ; if you never exercise an arbitrary authority over them, and command them only such things as are just, and which their own conscience dictates to them that they cannot refuse ; if they commit a fault, be assured that they are prepared to receive the reprimand with real benefit to their souls.

Elevate and aggrandize the ideas and sentiments of your servants by behaving towards them with politeness, dignity, and benevolence. I said with dignity, because, although you must always treat them with kindness : " Let a wise servant be dear to thee as thy own soul" (Ecclus. vii. 13) ; yet for their own sake you ought never to allow them to be familiar with you, nor give them an unlimited confidence, nothing could be more injurious to them ; you would become their slave, abusing your too great indulgence, they would require and expect from you a perfect compliance with their desires, and too often to their whims and ridiculous pretensions ; and as you will be obliged to refuse their demands, they will grow impertinent, and at length you will be compelled to dismiss them quite spoiled and unfit for another situation.

If you perceive in your waiting-maid some defect to which you did not suspect she was subject ; do not show that you are shocked at the discovery. Examine quietly by yourself, if it be an essential or insignificant

one. In the first case, endeavour to know from which cause it proceeds; if it be from inadvertency, giddiness, ignorance, or want of education, then apply yourself with assiduous and great patience to correct it, reflecting that her other good qualities make amends for her failings; you must consider yourself very happy to find out only defects, and not vices in those who attend you. As for those faults which are of no great consequence, or originate from character or natural turn of mind, do not flatter yourself that you will be able to correct them entirely, they will often reappear: *Chassez le naturel*, says a French poet, with great truth, *il revient au galop*. Longanimity and forbearance are the only remedies to which one ought to have recourse.

Speak to your waiting-maid not only to give her your orders, but also in a kind and maternal manner of the things in which she is personally concerned, or which interest her family; thus you will show her that you are not actuated by a vile egotism, and that you are sincerely desirous to promote her happiness, give her advice in her difficulties, and comfort in her occasional pains or afflictions. Be also attentive to praise her for her good-behaviour, and for the care which she takes of all the things which are intrusted to her. This is very important to prevent her from thinking that you are only attentive to her failings or mistakes, whilst you are blind to, or take no notice of what she does well. Never make use of harsh words indicative of passion, haughtiness, or contempt. When you reprimand, let it always be in moderate terms, listening with kindness to what the person accused may have to say in her defence, expressing at the same time a hope that she will be more careful for the future, and adopt the means suggested to her for her amendment; thus you will accomplish the precept of St. Paul: "If a man be overtaken in any

fault, you who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness.”—Gal. vi. 1. When we reprove our inferiors, our reproofs should be dictated by such discretion and wisdom, attended with such evident signs of charity, that they should be compelled to acknowledge if not in words, yet inwardly, that if they have been reprimanded it is not so much for the inconvenience, or the loss occasioned to us by their negligence or carelessness, as for the injury which they have done to themselves by not performing their obligations. In fine, whatever be the defects of your servants, as long as they remain at your service, treat them well.

I cannot in this place resist the temptation of relating to you what I have read of the conduct of the immortal Fenelon towards his servants: “He,” says an eyewitness of his domestic life, “looked upon as an inexcusable cruelty, the bitterness and asperity with which some masters, without reason or the least scrupulosity, spoke to their servants. He told me one day, referring to that subject, that he had had bad servants, whom he did not fail to discharge, as soon as he was informed of their behaviour, but without noise. ‘The good ones,’ added he, ‘are particularly dear to me, and for many reasons. Poor fellows! why should I by sourness increase the hardships and restraint of their dependant state? Nevertheless it often happens that carried away by my natural vivacity I chide them with too much quickness; but a minute after, I am sorry for what I have done, and cannot be quiet till I have by some excuse done away the painful impression left on their mind, and consoled my poor servants, though at the expense of self-love.’ One day,” continues the same person, “I was witness when the excellent prelate was obliged to speak to one of his servants in a louder tone of voice than usual. The next morning he went to him and privately exhorted him to

behave better for the future ; showing him at the same time the greatest kindness. Some of his friends having represented to him, that his too great indulgence authorized his servants to be inexact and negligent in the performance of their duties : ‘ I acknowledge it,’ answered he. ‘ I am sensible enough that I am not so punctually and properly attended as should be ; but I cannot help it. We are all belonging to human nature, and of course prone and liable to many defects. We are therefore bound to forgive one another a great many failings. I prefer to be guilty of an excess of mildness and forbearance, than an excess of severity and rigour ; “ for the anger of man worketh not the justice of God.” ’

In case you should have a housekeeper, as in this quality she would have a sort of superintendence over the other servants, you must show her, in their presence, esteem, consideration, and confidence as your delegate, and the depository of a part of your authority in their regard. Yet you must beware not to intrust her so entirely with the management of your household concerns, as to lead her to fancy that she has an unlimited power to ordain and do whatever she thinks proper. She must always remain impressed that she is only the hand to execute, and you the head which ought to govern and direct every thing, and that you have only appointed her to help and assist you in the details ; — for, I beseech you to remember, that the good qualities of your housekeeper do not, and ought not, to supersede the obligation of your personal attention and vigilance. Behave with an equal kindness towards all your servants, gentle and affectionate manners gain the heart more effectually than gifts in money. Avoid to show the least sign of partiality or preference to any one, otherwise you will sow the seeds of jealousy and envy among them. Those whom Almighty God has been

pleased to favour with a greater share of good sense, discretion, and probity, and who give you proofs of their zeal and devotedness, are surely entitled to greater regard and confidence, and it would be wrong to seem not to appreciate their worth ; but be upon your guard, lest you should be deluded by fine and false appearances, and suspect those whom you find inclined to speak ill of their companions.

You should not, certainly, discourage those, who from conscientious motives, consider it a duty incumbent on them to inform you of the abuses which they may have discovered in your house. You must thank them for their honesty and zeal for your interest ; but with moderation, adding, that you will narrowly examine into the thing, and act accordingly. But be particularly cautious not to lend too willing an ear to secret reports and accusations. There are, in every condition of life, and too often among servants, vile and degraded characters, that from sinful views, and in order to ingratiate themselves with their masters, are always upon the watch to discover the smallest failings in their fellow-servants, and eager to report them under false colouring, and with all the exaggeration of selfishness and envy. This, if you perceive, allows not a moment to lose, the base informer must be discharged without mercy.

Although you should watch over the conduct of your servants, you must take care not to show a suspicious disposition, nor be too inquisitive, and search too narrowly the motives which may influence their actions. When you have no solid reason to doubt their sincerity and uprightness, you may, with prudence, however, rely upon appearances ; the secret springs of the human heart are only known to God. As for those many little failings which are the appendage of our weak and imperfect nature ; they are better to be overlooked. It is

one of the best means to save oneself many occasions of troubles, anxieties and discontent. "Do not apply thy heart to all words that are spoken, lest perhaps thou hear thy servant reviling thee. For thy conscience knoweth, that thou also hast often spoken ill of others." —Eccl. vii. 21, 22.

You need not to be admonished that according to the principles of enlightened reason as well as of religion, the vices and disorders of servants are justly laid to the charge of their masters, when these, either by the loose or irreligious conversations which they hold in their presence, or by their dissipated and worldly life, daily instil into their minds relaxed maxims of morality which induce them to neglect their duties towards God, and transgress his holy law. But I do not entertain such a fear with regard to you. There is no doubt that they will never witness under your gentle and edifying government but examples of virtue and piety. But besides the strict obligation of never giving to your servants any occasion of sin, a recommendation which with you it would be as useless as improper to insist upon ; I shall advise you to use a precaution which pious people are often too apt to neglect from an ill-understood charity. For fear of acting against this heavenly virtue, they think that they ought to have an unreserved confidence in the honesty of their servants, and leave money, and other precious things within their reach, and thus expose them sometimes to temptations too strong for their weak nature to resist.

I remember to have read in the works of Abbé Fleury, under preceptor of the Duke of Burgundy, the pupil of the immortal Fenelon, the following anecdote, which in my opinion, contains a very useful warning: A gentleman of high birth and great fortune, having one day received a large sum of money in gold, left it upon his

table. His valet-de-chambre coming to shave him, remained alone with him, and begun to wash his face with soap and water ; when all at once and to his great astonishment, the gentleman saw him running away with the utmost speed leaving him half shaved. The valet-de-chambre not returning, and the master not being able to account for such a strange conduct, rung his bell, and sent some of his other servants after his valet-de-chambre, who coming back pale and trembling, and being asked what could be the motives of his flight, answered "I confess, sir, that perceiving how easy it would have been for me to take away all this money, had I been capable of a crime, I was seized with horror, and felt my hand shake under the razor. Do not therefore expose to temptations those who attend you ; since we are all frail, weak, prone to evil, and under the necessity of begging every day of God not to lead us into temptation. "Where there are many hands, shut up, and deliver all things in number and weight, and put all in writing what thou givest out or receiveth in."—Ecclus. xlii. 7. This advice of the wise man put in practice. Inquire of your servants the price of the different things which you commission them to buy, and make them give you every week an exact account of the money which they have received, and of the manner it has been spent. This exactitude which good order requires in the management of household affairs, will convince them, without hurting their feelings, that it would be impossible to cheat and deceive you, without being soon detected.

It is not enough for Christian masters or mistresses to teach their servants to be honest and virtuous according to the notions of the world, they must also do all that which depends on them, to make them faithful servants of God. They are therefore obliged to allow them full

time to be instructed in and fulfil their religious duties. For they ought to persuade themselves that it is much more for the advantage of their servants than for their own, that they can and ought to exercise their authority over them; that they have a common Lord and Master who strictly enjoins them to procure them all the means of securing their eternal salvation. Yet how little understood and still less practised, is this indispensable obligation, even sometimes by people who make profession of piety; nay, there are some so deluded as to flatter themselves, that they are rapidly tending to perfection by following the evangelical counsels, whilst by laying aside, through an unaccountable blindness, the most essential duties of Christianity, they are only nominal Christians. Thus a devout woman at the head of a family, falsely imagines that she has only to carry to the tribunal of penance faults of frailty, such as distractions in her prayers, transitory motions of vivacity, ill-humour, or vanity, &c.; whilst by her indifference concerning the salvation of her servants, she is under the awful sentence of St. Paul, already mentioned, "If any man have not care, especially of those of his house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."—1 Tim. v. 8.

Be careful to make your servants keep holy the Lord's day, and other festivals of obligation. Avoid therefore, as much as possible, on those days to give great dinners, to have numerous evening parties, and undertake unnecessary journeys, that they may have sufficient time to go to church, and assist at the morning and evening office. You should also regulate their occupations in such a manner that they might have some leisure time on Saturdays, or on the eve of great solemnities, or during the days of indulgence, that if they wished to approach the sacraments, they might have



time to prepare themselves for confession. I said, if they wished, because having in a plain and moving exhortation adapted to their respective capacity, represented to them the great benefit which they would reap from the receiving the sacraments in good dispositions, you must leave them at liberty to follow their devotion, never inquiring with curiosity what they may have done, lest by indiscreet questions you should expose them to tell lies, or in order to gain your favour, to receive the holy communion without being duly prepared. Do not rely with blind confidence on the piety of those who are eager to speak of their private mortifications, who affect to address themselves to your confessor, and communicate in your presence. True and solid piety is always attended with humility, and, if left to her choice, prefers to perform her good works privately rather than in public. If, for his particularly good conduct, any one of your servants has deserved a recompence, never bestow it on the days of his communion, it might be an occasion of yielding to the temptation of hypocrisy: it will be better to postpone the gift to another day.

To procure to yourself moral and intelligent servants, be neither parsimonious nor prodigal. As you are rich, give them rather higher than lower wages, and be extremely careful to pay them with the greatest punctuality. Reason, humanity, and religion, nay your own interest command it. "The wages of him that hath been hired by thee, shall not abide with thee until the morning."—Levit. xix. 13. "Behold the hire of the labourers, who have reaped down your fields, which by fraud has been kept back by you, crieth, and the cry of them hath entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."—Jam. v. 4. If you remain in their debt, you degrade yourself, and become in some degree their dependant. Seeing that you cannot pay them, they will grow saucy,

impertinent, and neglectful of their duty. You expose them besides to the temptation of being dishonest, falsely persuading themselves that they may by indirect thefts, indemnify themselves for the loss they experience from your delay in discharging their lawful claims ; and although they cannot be excused, yet you are the real cause of their infidelities, and answerable for them before the unerring tribunal of the sovereign Judge of mankind, in whose presence there is no exception of persons. When, during several years, you have experienced the fidelity and attachment of a servant, besides her yearly wages, place for her a certain sum of money in the savings-banks, as a testimony of your satisfaction. Such an unexpected generosity will increase her affection for you, and will be an encouragement to persevere in her good conduct.

It may happen that some of your servants wish to be married, do not use any means to deter them from it, unless you clearly foresee that the connexion which they intend to form, would be an obstacle to the accomplishment of their religious duties, and be detrimental to their present and future happiness. But when there is every probability that by marrying, they will continue to be virtuous and happy, help them with as much generosity as you can conveniently do ; for, I wish you to keep always present to your mind, that your servants are a part of your family, and in this quality more entitled to your beneficence than any other people. Although their leaving you on account of their marriage may occasion you some inconvenience, this is not a sufficient motive for you to engage them to sacrifice their lawful inclinations to your interest ; it would be a selfishness and egotism for which God would condemn you, and you would have to repent even in this world. Remember that “ charity seeketh not her own ; each one not considering

the things that are his own, but those that are of other men."—1 Cor. xiii. 14. ; Phil. ii. 4.

In case your servants should fall sick, you must not be satisfied to provide for them every corporal and spiritual assistance in your power, you must besides frequently visit them yourself, in order to see whether your charitable orders have been complied with, and administer to them all the consolation and support of which they may stand in need, not disdaining to render them the meanest services; but considering yourself highly honoured and particularly favoured with the opportunity offered to you to attend and serve our divine Saviour himself in their person: "I was sick, and you have visited me. . . . Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my little brethren, you did it to me."—Matt. xxv. 38—40. If through old age, protracted or incurable infirmities, they become incapable of rendering you their usual services, take care of them in your own house, if you can do it without too great an inconvenience; if not, do not send them empty away to the poor-house. Spare no expense to provide for them a proper asylum, where they may end their laborious career in peace and comfort. I cannot reconcile with sentiments of humanity and religion, the stinginess and insensibility of rich people, who retrench the wages of their servants for the space of time they have been ill, make them pay the visits of the physician or the attendance of the nurse, or send them to the hospital, as if they had no longer the least right to their justice and compassion, since they have been disabled by malady to perform their habitual labours. "If thou have a faithful servant, let him be to thee as thy own soul, do not leave him needy; treat him as a brother." Eccclus. vii. 23; xxxiii. 31. "The just regardeth the lives of his beasts; but the bowels of the wicked are cruel."—Prov. xii. 10.

## XV.

## CONDUCT IN THE WORLD.

God being the author and preserver of the different ranks and conditions that constitute human societies, it is his will that we should observe the rules, and fulfil the respective duties imposed upon every one of us, in order to maintain peace, order, and happiness in the world. Therefore, as you are destined by his providence to live in it, it is essential for you to be well instructed with regard to the conduct which you ought to hold in your necessary intercourse with your neighbour, not to be exposed to lose your soul. The spirit of Jesus Christ and of the sacred covenant which he came to establish betwixt God and men, embraces time and eternity, souls and bodies, heaven and earth. If the fundamental law of his religion command us to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and not to love the world, nor the things of the world; it also enjoins us to love our neighbour as ourselves, to do to others what we should be glad should be done unto us—"to render to all men their dues. This commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God, love all his brother."—1 John. iv. 21; Rom. xiii. 7.

In resuming your former relations with the world after your conversion, the best thing which you can do, is to show yourself on the first day among your friends and acquaintances, such as you wish and ought to be all the days of your life, a sincere Christian and a good Catholic. Let them learn by the whole tenour of your conduct, rather than by your words, that you have renounced, without reserve, all the vanities and dangerous amusements of the world. The surest means to get rid of teasing importunities and repeated temptations, is not

to remain neuter between vice and virtue, but to declare oneself openly for virtue. The world, always excessive and unjust in its opinions and censures, will say that you are going to throw yourself headlong into exaggerated devotion. But if you stand firm and immovable in your good resolutions ; if you be not ashamed of Jesus Christ, he will “ give you a forehead of brass against iniquity, he will make your face like an adamant against all the suggestions of worldly friends. Be not afraid : he will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist and gainsay.”—Is. iii. 8 ; Luke xxi. 15. Hence, perceiving no probability of success in their attempts, they will insensibly withdraw and leave you quiet.

To have recourse to timid managements with the world, in order to avoid its disapprobation and censures, is beneath the noble and independent character of a Christian. I know that there are condescensions to several customs and usages which ought to be complied with ; that charity is prudent and from the purest motives, assumes different shapes ; it teaches to be weak with the weak, and sometimes it is a virtue to appear, as it were, less virtuous and perfect. But, I say that all actions which would tend to persuade the world that we still approve its maxims and abuses ; that all condescensions which might induce people to think that we consider the reputation of being the servants of God as a sign of weakness, or limited understanding, are a criminal dissimulation, a sort of apostacy, extremely injurious to religion, and less excusable than a barefaced depravity, because it would be to be ashamed of God himself. All temperaments concerning duties, are always to be feared ; to pretend to reconcile every thing together, is to be willing to lose all ; to invent mitigations, when the law is clear and positive, is not saving the rule, but gratifying our passions. No agreement can be made between lies

and truth, without a real detriment to truth itself. The Gospel proposes and establishes invariable rules, and not expedients. "In short, no man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other; or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."—Matt. vi. 24.

You will have, very likely, to suffer for a time a sort of indirect persecution from some of your former acquaintances, whose opinions you no longer partake, and you may be exposed to their scoffs and raileries. To despise them is both a duty and the only means to preserve a noble and generous independence. Moreover, when you seriously reflect upon the frivolousness and inconsistency of human opinions, you will be soon sensible how necessary it is to be entirely disengaged from them in order to acquire a solid virtue. We have on y one road to follow, it is that which Jesus Christ has traced out for us, and in which all the saints have walked with indefatigable zeal and perseverance: otherwise we shall be tossed about by every wind, and always liable to doubts and endless anxieties. If we can be deprived at every moment of our peace of heart by the various and often contradictory discourses and judgments of men, we shall be the most miserable of beings. Let us, therefore, "make little account of being judged by the judgments of men."—Im. of Christ. Let them say or think of us what they please. As for us, let us banish all painful reflections on their opinions and censures. "Let not thy peace be in the tongues of men, for whether they put a good or a bad construction on what thou doest, thou art still what thou art. Where is true peace and glory? Is it not in me? And he who covets not to please men, nor fears their displeasure, shall enjoy much peace."—Im. of Christ. After having done and suffered so much to satisfy a senseless world,

it seems to me that it is but just that we should suffer a little from its folly in order to acquire true wisdom. Besides, almost always the blame and contempt of the world are the signs of merit and virtue. Remember what our Saviour says : " If the world hate you, know that it hath hated me before you. . . . If you had been of the world, the world would love its own ; but because you are not of the world—the world hateth you." —John xv. 19.

Perhaps, also, for I wish to caution you against every contingency, and guard you against every danger ; perhaps you will feel as St. Austin himself experienced, when he was moved by the first impulse of divine grace, all the pleasures of the world whispering to your ears, Are you going to take an eternal farewell from us ? Consider, that if you take this rash resolution, your life will henceforth be a perpetual restraint, and an uninterrupted succession of gloomy and melancholy days. When carried away by some violent passion, we are apt to persuade ourselves that we are created to enjoy the sweets of this life, and that gratifying propensities which are born with us cannot be a crime. But let us not be deceived, this frivolous and ill-grounded persuasion is not an excuse, and still less a security. It is a strong desire ; because we strongly wish, that all that which we are very fond of could be lawful, but it is not a real conviction. It is the language of vanity eager to display its superiority above what worldlings call the maxims of the vulgar ; but it is not a sentiment imprinted deeply in the heart.

If, after the example of the same St. Austin, you resist the seducing instructions of our corrupt nature, your courage will be rewarded to the hundred fold. God will speak to your heart, preserve in you that unspeakable peace of a purified soul, which you now enjoy, and grant

you the liberty of the children of God. I confess that these inward and spiritual delights bear no resemblance with those intoxicating pleasures which bewilder, deceive, and cause for a while the partisans of the world to forget their miseries, and think themselves happy ; but you will have the certainty that they are of a permanent nature, cannot be taken away from you, and are the prelude of those unspeakable joys, which the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard, and the heart of man cannot comprehend. What a comfort—to be able, at all times, to descend into the inmost recesses of our conscience, without fear of hearing its reproaches, to have nothing to hide from the piercing eye of the most malignant censure, to like all we do, because in it we discover the will of God ; and not to wish for the things which he thinks proper not to give us, because his refusal is an evident proof for us, that were we to possess them it would be to our great injury. Thus, by renouncing the treacherous allurements of the world, and not taking its opinions, pride, or passion for your counsellors ; in the midst of contradictions, disappointments, labours, afflictions, or sicknesses (inseparable of our mortal existence) you will feel every day the truth of this saying of St. Paul : “ Godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”—1 Tim. iv. 8.

Living a very retired life, never assisting at tea-parties, routs, or concerts, I own that I am not a very competent judge about ladies’ dress ; I shall therefore confine myself to lay down general principles without entering into details. The first thing which I recommend to you is to avoid singularity and affectation ; so, that entering into a circle, no one will take notice of your dress ; aim only at simplicity and seemliness. This recommendation I give you, not only when you are to appear in public



but also when you intend to remain at home. It is not uncommon, among married women, to be too careless in this respect, not being well aware of the bad consequences which are usually the result of their neglect. Before the sacred engagement is contracted they are attentive and industrious enough about their person, and setting themselves up to the best advantage. After marriage, it is sometimes the reverse; they foolishly imagine that they are no longer obliged by propriety of dress to render themselves agreeable to their husbands; elegant to a degree when they are to receive company, they are regardless of neatness, and sometimes even slovenly in their morning or evening clothes, and quite indifferent respecting the manner in which they are dressed when alone with them. It is a very great mistake; married women, says the Rev. Mr. Archer, in one of his sermons upon matrimony, must be careful to keep up those nice attentions to their person, dress, comportment, &c. &c., by which, at first, they gained each other's esteem and regard; employing the same methods to secure the husband which at first they made use of to gain the lover. Besides, in every society, that gross familiarity which excludes civility of manners, and tramples on the forms of decorum, will insensibly and almost infallibly degenerate into contempt." I shall add, do you wish to be always loved by your husband, neglect nothing that can make you lovely and sweet in his eyes?

I need not tell you, that I am far from advising you to have recourse to those designing arts of coquetry, which, blameable and contemptible in a young person, are highly disgusting and criminal in a married woman and a mother. I mean only, that you ought never to lay aside that unaffected neatness and exterior modesty which indicate the purity of the heart, and diffuse peculiar charms on the whole demeanour, enhance the influence

of beauty when it exists, and supply it when superseded by the wrinkles of old age. Conform yourself to the prevailing fashions as far as they are compatible with the rules of Christian decency. Be not the first to introduce, nor the last to leave them; but deeply imprint in your mind that the general practice, or the example of ladies who enjoy the reputation of virtue and piety, can never authorize the least deviation from modesty. It is a matter of great importance, and, respecting which many women, otherwise of irreproachable character, are apt to deceive themselves. It will not be a justification for them to say that they intend no harm, that they are not actuated by impure motives; it is sufficient to render them guilty before God, that they may be an occasion of scandal to others. But let them interrogate thoroughly their conscience in his divine presence, could they affirm, without hesitation, that the immodesty of their dress has never exposed men to the temptation mentioned in the Gospel, "Whosoever shall look upon a woman, to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."—Matt. v. 28. Follow the rule of conduct given by the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul to married women newly converted to the Christian faith: "Let wives be subject to their husbands, that if any believe not the word they may be won without the word, by the conversation of the wives: considering your chaste conversation with fear. Whose adorning, let it not be the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold, or the putting on of apparel: but the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptibility of a quiet and meek spirit, which is rich in the sight of God."—1 Pet. iii. 1—4. In like manner women also in decent apparel, adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety: not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire, but as becometh women professing godliness, with good works."—1 Tim. ii. 9, 10.

The two apostles did not intend to condemn the various sorts of dress which discriminate the different conditions of life from and are suitable to each other. Enlightened and guided in their decisions by divine wisdom, they well knew that to people of a high rank, a more adorned attire may be allowed than to those of a low birth or placed in narrow circumstances. But they strictly enjoined that women, whatever might have been their rank, should pay the utmost attention to the rules of modesty in their dress, that they should retrench all that would border on vanity and unnecessary pompous apparel, conforming themselves to the principles of Christian humility, and above all things avoiding all sorts of affectation or coquetry, with a secret view of attracting the eyes of men.

Vanity in women is a sort of original sin, which is the cause of the greatest part of their defects and errors. Those who have in their youth the care of education, would render them a most essential service, and most effectually contribute to their advancement in virtue and happiness, if they could persuade them that nothing is more contemptible and mean than vanity ; that that body which they take so much care to adorn, is but a bit of clay which will soon moulder away and be reduced into dust ; that all the attractions of corporal beauty are frail and transitory, that an unforeseen accident, a fit of sickness, even in the bloom of youth, may in a moment destroy for ever ; that when alone they cannot inspire lasting attachment and regard, and often indeed are only the occasion of envy, troubles, jealousy, and sad disappointments. If religion be consulted, it will offer to the reflecting mind still more impressive considerations. Will it not appear quite unaccountable that persons who adore a God crowned with thorns, should pass several hours in adorning their heads with all the decorations which

fashion or caprice invents ; and, as Tertullian observes, should spend in their splendid attire the revenue of a whole province, whilst they are surrounded with poor destitute of the necessaries of life, and of whom it can be said, as it was of our common lord and master, "that they have not where to lay their head."—Luke ix. 58. But what is more scandalous and criminal is, that married and single women, who still pretend to be Christians, should sometimes adopt all the sinful arts of a refined coquetry, and thus set themselves upon a level with those of their sex who have no reputation to lose. "Show yourselves," said Tertullian, "Christian women in the dress prescribed by the apostles. Let the propriety and decorum of your carriage proclaim the simplicity of your soul. Let the decency of your countenance be a faithful interpreter of the purity of your sentiments. Let an amiable and sweet reserve be in your looks, a modest silence on your lips, the words of Jesus Christ in your ears, and the yoke of the Lord on your head. Be clothed with the golden tissue of holiness, and the bright purple of true evangelical pudency. Thus dressed and adorned you will please God, and have Jesus Christ for your spouse."—Tert. de Ch. Fem., lib. ii.

I leave these passages to your most serious reflections. They will, I trust, be a sufficient preservative against the most plausible arguments of the world. The morality of the Gospel always consonant with the dictates of an upright conscience and enlightened reason, allows in certain circumstances, a more costly attire to a lady of a high rank who is obliged to appear at court. But what could she say for her apology when, without being compelled by peculiar and extraordinary causes, the price of her apparel would support in a comfortable way three or four poor families for a whole year? I

know that Esther was clothed in the richest and most splendid manner, without being blamed in the Holy Scriptures; but it was neither from pride, nor fondness for pageantry and gaudy ornaments, she only yielded to necessity. "Thou knowest," said she in her moving and sublime prayer, "my necessity, that I abominate the sign of my pride and glory which is upon my head on the days of my public appearance, and detest it as a filthy rag, and wear it not in the days of my silence." Be always animated with these pious sentiments, and you will never exceed in your dress the bounds of moderation, modesty, and decorum.

I am not a politician; I shall not therefore examine here whether luxury is to be encouraged in order to promote the prosperity of the state, or when it pervades all classes and ranks, it ought to be considered as contributing to the corruption of morals, and as a forerunner of the decline and downfall of the most powerful empires: this I leave to philosophers and statesmen to discuss. You are a Christian; you wish to regulate your life according to the maxims of the Gospel; it is therefore with regard to these sacred relations that I shall lay down before you the following reflections: We read in St. Matthew that Jesus Christ said to his disciples, that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven, and that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." Hearing this, you will without doubt wonder much, and repeat with the disciples, "who then can be saved?" My answer will be that of our Saviour himself: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Hence, those who have inherited or acquired a large fortune by lawful means, are not obliged to give it up, and reduce themselves to poverty to work out their salvation. But one must

candidly acknowledge that riches after which the generality of men long so ardently, and for the obtaining and preserving of which they labour with indefatigable care, are too frequently a great obstacle to it, because in the use of them it is very easy to be deceived, and look upon as lawful what is strictly forbid ; and besides, because they expose to the danger of yielding to pride, elation of heart, and to indulge luxury. One could scarcely imagine how closely riches adhere to, and how strongly, though imperceptibly they are incorporated with the heart. Were we to feel the melancholy consequences of their power and influence, we should be ready to cry out with anguish, " Ye rich men, weep and howl in your miseries which shall come upon you," as the apostle James said.—v. 1. But in the quiet possession of their riches, the rich are not aware of the criminal attachment which they have for them; meeting with no impediment to the gratification of their passions, they rest as it were on a bed of down, and give themselves up to a treacherous sleep, which prevents them from seeing the precipice under their feet; in order, therefore, to avoid falling into illusions unfortunately very frequent in the world, it is highly necessary to have correct notions and unquestionable rules respecting the use of riches.

When God is pleased to bestow upon men the goods and prosperities of this world, we ought not to persuade ourselves that he grants them at the same time a full liberty to make use of them according to their liking or fancy. If to some he gives more than they want, it is with the view that the overplus should be distributed to those who have not a competency. If he shower down temporal blessings with a liberal hand upon the rich, it is to make them the dispensers of a portion of them upon the poor. By that great affluence and continual

success in their undertakings he puts to the test the real dispositions of the rich : he will soon discover whether their covetous heart will swallow up all his favours for their private satisfaction, or being moved with gratitude at the effusions of his goodness over them, they will be induced to imitate it by acts of tender compassion and benevolence towards their destitute brethren. The rich should also consider that earthly goods have been bestowed upon them as means to redeem their iniquities and daily failings and imperfections, and thus treasure up merits of an infinite value for the world to come. "O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee," said Daniel to Nabuchodonozor, "and redeem thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor, perhaps he will forgive thy offences."—Dan. iv. 24. "Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harbourless into thy house, when thou shalt see one naked, cover him, and despise not thy own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall speedily arise, and thy justice shall go before thy face, and the glory of the Lord shall gather thee up. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall hear. Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. . . . When thou shalt pour out thy soul to the hungry, and shalt satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise up in darkness, and thy darkness shall be as noonday. And the Lord will give rest continually, and will fill thy soul with brightness, and deliver thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water, whose waters shall not fail."—Isaiah lviii. 7—11. "Alms delivereth from death, and the same is that purgeth away sin, and maketh find mercy and life everlasting."—Tob. xii. 9. "Thy prayer is heard," said St. Peter, to Cornelius, the centurion, "and thy alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God."—Acts x. 31.

“Before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves: for charity covereth a multitude of sins.”—1 Pet. iv. 8. Thus riches, which usually are a deadly poison, may become a most efficacious remedy. Instead of being lost by their distribution, they are thereby possessed with greater security. As long as they remain in our possession, they are frail, transitory and perishable. By passing into the hands of the poor, their nature is changed, they become unalterable, incorruptible, and the principle of eternal enjoyments. It is for this purpose, O most merciful and just God! that from that unfathomable ocean of riches of which thou art the eternal and inexhaustible source, thou makest some streams flow upon the rich; thou raisest them above the common level, and avertest from them the wants and calamities which afflict their fellow-creatures, that they may with more liberty be the dispensers of thy blessings, and contribute to the comfort and happiness of thy children.

Self-love is extremely ingenious to create necessities, in order to be justified in the unrestrained enjoyment of riches. Nay, sometimes it is indifferent and careless about finding out excuses, because when their fortune is lawfully their own, people think themselves thereby sufficiently authorized to use it as they please. But this is a downright illusion. God does not grant to any one an absolute and irresponsible dominion over his *superfluity*. 1st. Because he cannot allow to enjoy creatures for their own sake. 2d. According to the admirable order established by the providence of God in this sublunary world, there is nothing useless, or superfluous in his works: what is superfluous to one thing is necessary to another. Without the superabundant moisture poured down into the bowels of the earth, the vegetation of plants could not exist. The relations of the rich to the poor are simi-



lar. What is 'unnecessary or superfluous to the rich, is necessary to the poor. The poor have as much right to what the rich are not in need of, as the rich themselves to what is indispensable to them ; and according to the sentiments of the holy fathers, to keep back the poor from what we do not want, is no less sin than to take away what belongs to them.

But in what does consist that *necessary*, which the rich have a right to use and preserve for themselves, and that superfluity which is their bounden duty to bestow upon the poor ? The variety of situations and circumstances, renders it impossible to draw a line so clearly marked out as to be applicable to all cases, and leave no room for examination and uncertainty ; and what is truly lamentable, the obscurity of the rule respecting the full extent of the precept, is a pretext to violate it. However, the more difficult it is to discriminate precisely the *superfluous* from the *necessary*, the more fearful should the rich be to be deceived, and to sacrifice the interests of their salvation to the interests of their passions. That awful uncertainty should be sufficient motive to a good Christian, to incline him to assist the poor, even to his own prejudice.

In order to give you of what is necessary or superfluous, as clear a notion as can be done in a matter subject to so many variations, and a rule which preserving the exactness of the principle, yet would be exempt from exaggeration, I shall observe to you, that when I speak of the *necessary* of the rich, I do not mean the *necessary* of man, viz., what is necessary to support life ; but the necessary of the condition which they are entitled to make use of and preserve. Religion does not confound nor destroy the different gradations of ranks. The necessary is not the same in all. What is necessary to one, may be superfluous to another. What is required to

maintain with moderation, propriety, and decorum the situation which we hold in society, is the proper measure of the necessary allowed to every one : a measure very unequal indeed, considering the different degrees of the social scale in which we are placed by Divine Providence ; yet a measure fixed and certain for all, and which all are obliged to respect and observe. All that is beyond, is superfluous. From this notion, it is easy to conclude that all the necessities which proceed from vanity, idle curiosity and the love of pleasure, and which tend to corrupt the heart, are imaginary necessities prohibited by the law of God, and which are to be reckoned among that mammon of iniquity with which our Saviour commands us to “ make friends that may receive us into everlasting dwellings.”—Luke xvi. 8. Such is the condition of the rich ; such are their duties fixed, not by mutable and temporal, but by imprescriptible, invariable, and eternal laws. It is therefore true, though it will scarcely be believed, that the rich in the possession of their riches have no real advantage over the poor. Since the former are only the stewards of their property of which they will be obliged to render one day a very strict account, and which they are bound to distribute according to rules which they cannot infringe, without incurring a most severe punishment ; whilst the latter are by their indigence exempt from responsibility, and have a greater facility to work out their salvation.

Examine yourself with impartiality, and apply to the subject which you have mentioned in your last letter, the principles which distinguish the necessary from the superfluous. Pray, is that *superfluous* a vain name which has no meaning in practice ? If not, which I am well assured you will candidly acknowledge, have I not a right to call superfluous the alterations which you intend in your country seat ? Your noble father who never was

suspected of being parsimonious or narrow-minded, but rather inclined to indulge pomp and splendour, had built and fitted it up in a manner suited to his rank and fortune. Why are you not satisfied? Why do you wish for greater conveniences and ornaments? You say, that unexpectedly you have received a sum of money, which will enable you to execute your project, without retrenching your usual expenses, and alms, or contracting any debt. Besides, that you are firmly resolved not to exceed the sum received. But can you answer that you will immovably adhere to this resolution? With regard to building and furniture, the expenses always surpass the previous calculations. The temptation of going a little further, softly and almost imperceptibly insinuates itself. For fear of awakening a salutary apprehension, it hides itself under a very modest garb; but by degrees, the apprehension abates and disappears. The temptation becomes a violent passion and an irresistible tyranny. The first embellishment seems to require a second. One remarks that such a part of the building will be shocking to the sight, if another does not correspond with it. Each alteration, or new ornament, considered in itself and separately appears of no great importance, and even is looked upon as necessary; yet the whole is superfluous and the expense excessive. In the mean while, the architects and upholsterers are near at hand, and under the most specious pretences will suggest further improvements, and conveniences; they will tell you that the additional expense will be trifling, and you will conclude that no reasonable objection can be opposed to your following their advice. Your worldly acquaintances will applaud; your real friends, seeing you bent to the undertaking, and not daring to contradict you, will remain silent; whilst the numerous poor around your estate will secretly murmur and condemn you. Oh! how many

even virtuous people, by their passion for building, embellishments, and costly furniture, have often entailed upon their posterity the greatest embarrassments, and perhaps, a secret curse. Since you are not in want of these £ , can you not make a better use of them than by heaping stones upon stones, adorning your apartments with pompous hangings, which the "moth will consume, and where the thieves can break through and steal."—Matt. vi. 19. I shall tell you what a holy bishop answered to a Pope who was showing him his fine buildings: "Command that these stones be made bread." *Dic ut lapides isti panes fiant*. Make the poor partakers of th increase of your riches. Visit their cottages; help them by a proper assistance, to render them more healthy and comfortable; to those who are without a home, and wandering about without having a stone to rest their head on, buy some small piece of land where they can build for themselves a shelter against the inclemencies of the seasons; supply them with beds, clothes, &c. I own that by making such a use of your superfluity, your pride will not be gratified in the summer by a crowd of visitors, who will extol to the skies the magnificence of the building, the classic beauty of the architecture, the exquisite taste and elegance of the furniture, &c. &c. But as long as you live, whenever you take a walk or ride around your possessions, you will hear the parents and children blessing you as their benefactress and the author of their happiness. Your neighbours and acquaintances speaking of you, will apply to you what Job said of himself: "The ear that heard her blessed her, and the eye that saw her gave witness to her; because she had delivered the poor that cried out and the fatherless, that had no helper. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon her, and she comforted the heart of the widow; she was clad with justice as

with a robe and a diadem : she was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame, and the mother of the poor.”—Job. xxix. 15. And on the day of the general retribution, when God will render to every one according to his works, your heart will be replenished with unspeakable joy, hearing the sovereign Judge addressing you these words.—“Come ye blessed of my father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat : I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink : I was a stranger and you took me in : naked, and you covered me : I was in prison, and you came to me. Then shall you answer him, saying, Lord, when did I see thee hungry and fed thee ? thirsty, and I gave thee drink ? And when did I see thee a stranger, and took thee in ; or naked, and covered thee ? Or when did I see thee in prison or sick and came to thee ? And the King answering, shall say to you : Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.”—Matt. xxv. 34.

Nothing is more dangerous than the introduction and maintenance of bad customs, especially those which regard luxury, because they excite people of moderate income to imitate the expenses of those that are favoured with a larger fortune, from the silly fear of being looked upon as inferior to them, and thus exposed to contempt and disdain. These worldly motives induce some to be covetous about riches, and often not very delicate and scrupulous about the means of acquiring them ; others to retrench their usual alms, and sometimes to ruin their family to provide for the extravagant expenses which luxury commands. There is no doubt that all those who, by their example, promote these excesses, ought to be considered as accessory to them, since they patronize the bad customs which produce them. One may say,

that they preach ostentation and pride ; and their sermons are so much the more dangerous, that by continually, though silently acting upon the senses, they exercise the most powerful influence over the soul.

The vices which are condemned by every one are certainly grievous sins, but the more striking their deformity and notorious their condemnation, the less scandalous they are, because they are seldom the occasion of sin to others. Hence the greatest and the most contagious scandals are those which proceed from vicious customs which are scarcely disapproved, which the complying with is judged as a matter of indifference, and of course are the remote causes of the disorders and transgressions of many—in which the nature of scandal consists. Gross depravity inspires horror and disgust, whilst vice disguised and hidden under fair and seducing appearances, attracts the generality of men. Thus to render vice amiable, to endeavour by specious arguments to stifle the remorse which it excites in the conscience, to authorize, by actions or discourses all that leads to it, is what ought particularly to be called, giving scandal. Thus those who, without acting or speaking, yet display before the eyes of their neighbour, their pride, vanity, ostentation, luxury, and love of the pleasures of the world, are, in reality, guilty of the heinous sin of scandal ; religion, therefore, strictly enjoins moderation, simplicity in the use of riches, in buildings, furniture, lawful amusements, and the expenses of the table.

A rule, from which you should never deviate, is never to allow the expenses to surpass the revenue. The precaution to have always beforehand one year of your yearly income, I much commend. You will thereby provide, as far as human prudence can do, against unforeseen accidents or contingencies. In case your

tenants should suffer great loss by fire, hailstorms, or inundations, &c., you will be able to give them relief in their distress, by a temporary reduction of, or a total discharge from their rents, if absolutely necessary; and this act of beneficence, not to say of justice, will not compel you to make any alteration in your way of living.

I very much approve of your intention to contribute to the erection and support of a Catholic chapel in your neighbourhood; and I exhort you to do it with generosity; I only beg leave to observe to you, that the exterior embellishments and internal decorations, and vestments should not be as splendid as for a cathedral. Either in the most obscure corner of a lonely vale, or in the magnificent basilicks of a large metropolis, it is the same God whom we adore. If we reflect for ever so little on his awful majesty, and all his infinite perfections, the richest stuffs, pearls, diamonds, silver and gold chalices, always will appear very inadequate and imperfect signs of the profound veneration, gratitude, and adoration we owe to him, and nothing is more praiseworthy than to make use of these precious things in the exterior worship which we are obliged to offer up to him; yet, in the places inhabited by the poor, he is equally pleased with their homages and offerings, although they be presented to him under more plain and humble symbols. I advise you to provide that the house of God should always be kept neat, clean, and in good order. With respect to altar and communion cloths, albs, and sacred vessels, confine yourself within the bounds of a noble simplicity, not from any motive of parsimony, but to prevent the complaints and murmurings of the poor, who are too apt to say that the money spent to pay for such costly and brilliant ornaments might have been better employed in relieving their wants. Besides, in

those precious gifts, sometimes very human motives insinuate themselves imperceptibly, and were we to dive with a piercing eye into the secret recesses of our souls, we should discover that feelings of pride and self-complacency had a greater share in our munificence than the pure love of God. It is not so rare as one could think, to meet with pious people who are generous, and sometimes beyond their means, when they are requested to contribute to things which will have a great splendour, and yet grumble, and are stingy if they be solicited to promote, by a timely and moderate help, the prosecution of the most useful good works ; such, for instance, as paying for the maintenance of a schoolmaster or mistress, affording to poor parents the means of sending their children to school, or assure to the missionary a modest competency. But in these, as well as in all good works, discernment, prudence, and charity ought to be consulted, and what they suggest or dictate, be done with zeal and cheerfulness.

To yield to a first feeling of compassion at the sight of one of our fellow-creatures in distress, and to assist him immediately, is a proof of a good heart ; but these first tender emotions are not an invariable rule to follow. The sentiment which ought to prompt us to relieve the needy and destitute, should exclude no one ; but it admits a choice and preference. Discretion and order must direct us in the distribution of our benefits. “ If thou dost good, know to whom thou dost it, and there shall be much thanks for thy good deeds.—Eccl. xii. 1. Among the distressed and poor a distinction may be made ; the age, the infirmities, the sex, the circumstances they are in, the more or less want ought to be considered. It is not forbid, nay, it is conformable to reason to listen in our gifts to the affections which nature and religion authorize, viz., relations of kindred, country, society, and



neighbourhood. A particular regard to merit and virtue is to be paid. "Do good to the just, and thou shalt find great recompence; and if not of him, assuredly of the Lord."—Eccl. xii. 2. And as Catholics, on account of their religion, are often left more destitute, keep constantly in view the precept of the apostle St. Paul, "Whilst we have time let us work good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith."—Gal. vi. 10. These precautions, which are dictated by an enlightened charity, being taken,—when a person, whom you know to be in real distress claims your assistance, never examine whether he is a Catholic or Protestant, hasten to relieve him whatever may be his creed, his misery has given him a sacred right to your beneficence. Remember the conduct of the good Samaritan, let it always be your model.

In your alms and acts of beneficence you must always be guided by prudence and moderation, that you may not be exposed to give what is not truly yours: therefore, in order to gratify your tender and compassionate feelings, never allow yourself to borrow money, contract debts, postpone the payment of the wages of your servants, the bills of your tradesmen, the hire of your labourers, or to mortgage the legitimate property of your children. That charity and benevolence may be virtues, they must be grounded upon, and attended with justice. "He that taketh away the bread gotten by sweat, is like him that killeth his neighbour; he that sheddeth blood, and he that defraudeth the labourer of his hire are brothers.—Eccl. xxxiv. 26, 27. The wages of him that hath been hired by thee, shall not abide with thee until the morning.—Levit. xix. 13. Thou shalt not refuse the hire of the needy, . . . whether he be thy brother or stranger; . . . but thou shalt pay him the price of his labour the same day, before the going

down of the sun, because he is poor and with it maintaineth his life : lest he cry against thee to the Lord, and it be reputed to thee for a sin.—Deut. xxiv. 14, 15. If any man hath done any work for thee, immediately pay him his hire, and let not the wages of thy hired servant stay with thee at all.—Tob. iv. 15. According to thy ability, be merciful ; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little ; for thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward for the day of necessity.”—Tob. iv. 8, 9, 10. These wise maxims dictated by the Holy Ghost, have not certainly been recorded in the sacred writings merely to be the object of a speculative and barren admiration, but as rules and examples for our imitation and guidance. Regulate, therefore, your almsdeeds, and acts of beneficence according to them ; and you will never have to reproach yourself with parsimoniousness nor prodigality.

However extensive your liberalities may be, always think that you have given but very little, and only performed an obligation from which you could not be dispensed. When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say, “ We are unprofitable servants, we have done that we ought to do.”—Luke xvii. 10. Pay also a particular attention to the precept of our Lord : “ When thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth : that thy alms may be in secret, and thy father who seeth in secret will repay thee.”—Matt. vi. 3, 4. For the most holy souls are sometimes yielding to secret feelings of self-complacency, which diminishes the merit of their liberality. We read in the *Lives of the Saints*, that St. Melania carried one day six hundred marks of silver to a holy abbot. The venerable old man, without interrupting his work, said to one of his disciples, “ Take all that plate, and distribute it among the poorest monasteries.”

Melania expected that he would give her some sign that he prized the value of her gift. But as he continued working, she told him, "Father, I do not know whether you are sensible that, what I just brought to you amounts to six hundred marks." The holy abbot, even without looking at her, answered her, "You would be perfectly right in making this observation, if it were to me that you had made this gift. But is it not to God that you have offered this silver? Believe me, there is no need of your telling him what is the weight."

In doing good do not let yourself be hurried on by that ardent zeal and anxious activity, which takes possession of the whole soul, and absorbs as it were all its thoughts and faculties, and thus averts from the accomplishment of essential and indispensable duties. In the practice of good works, the advice given by St. Paul, "not to be more wise than it behoveth, but to be wise unto sobriety" (Rom. xii.) must be the rule of our conduct." Consider also that Christian benevolence or charity does not confine itself to give food, raiment, or money. It displays itself by sensible testimonies of compassion, interest, and heartfelt sympathy. Never put off till to-morrow, the good which you can do to-day. "Say not, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give to thee."—Prov. iii. 28. "In every gift shew a cheerful countenance. Bow down thy ear cheerfully to the poor, and pay what thou owest, and answer him peaceable words with mildness."—Ecclus. iv. 35. The poor and distressed stand often more in need of consolatory words than of corporeal assistance. In your good works never separate the one from the other. A soul penetrated with the love of God, and always beholding in the poor—notwithstanding their rudeness, and too often their ingratitude—the divine characters of Jesus Christ, is never contracted nor dried up by the over delicacies of self-love. In her

bowels, if we can speak so, there is, as the Scripture says, an inexhaustible source of living waters, diffusing life and fecundity wherever they flow. "She bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things" with a tender compassion, and feelings congenial to the feelings of others; she mingles her tears with those of the afflicted, not by a formal appearance of concern and sympathy, but from the overflowings of a heart which divine charity has animated with the most tender, solid, and lasting sentiments of affection and regard.

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## XVI.

### ON THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

Jesus Christ says in the Gospel, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."—Matt. xix. 19. The word *neighbour*, does not mean only such persons whom, from particular motives, we are inclined or obliged to love. Among those whom our Saviour has commanded us to love, we ought not to understand only our relatives, friends, benefactors, countrymen, and those very rare individuals, who, by their eminent virtues or distinguished qualities, naturally inspire with a high esteem and lively affection. The word neighbour includes in its meaning, all our fellow-creatures. A man may be a stranger, and in no ways interesting to us, yet as a man he is our neighbour; as a being capable of happiness, he has just claims to our interest and love. The wicked themselves are not excluded from that universal charity we owe to all men. We ought not indeed to love them as wicked: in this respect our love for them consists in earnestly wishing for their conversion, and that by renouncing their wickedness, they may deserve to be loved for their

good qualities; nay, if by our death we could be assured to procure the salvation of the worst of sinners, we should be ready to make a generous sacrifice of our life for this desirable end. "In this we have known the charity of God, because he has laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."—1 John iii. 16.

When the love of our neighbour predominates in the heart, it shows itself, not only in extraordinary circumstances, but in the most ordinary occurrences of life, and not "in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth"—1 John iii. 18. Although you be no longer a member of the Established Church, the obligation of considering Protestants whatever may be the difference of their religious opinions, as your neighbour, and loving them as such, remains in its full force. The only change which your Protestant friends should discover in you since your return to the Catholic Church, is, if possible, a greater affability, kindness, and disposition to please and oblige them. Your whole demeanour must prove that on that account you do not set yourself above them. If you perceive that some of them keep themselves at a distance from you, make the first advances in order to remove their ill-grounded prejudices. If you think that they expect some service from you, try to read in their looks what they wish for, and with an ingenious delicacy, be industrious to prevent their desires, so as to persuade them, that by affording you an occasion of obliging them, they have conferred a favour upon you rather than received it themselves. A refined and well-understood pride, from an inordinate love of praise, and through vain glory, would adopt this method. A sincere and enlightened piety would follow it from religious and disinterested motives. For nothing is so noble, so generous, so de-

licate, so heroic as the heart of a sincere Christian. In him, there is no guile, no deceit, no affectation, all his conduct clearly exhibits unequivocal signs of uprightness, disinterestedness, and simplicity.

Those engaging manners, that spirit of condescension, and attention to please, to which I exhort you with respect to your Protestant friends, ought nevertheless not to be carried so far as to appear to agree with their opinions on religious matters, or to be indifferent about them. This would be betraying your faith, and render you criminal in the sight of God. When any subject of controversy is introduced, either at table or in the drawing room, do not interfere of your own accord, remain silent ; if urged to speak, answer with a modest assurance, that you have examined with impartiality and in the presence of God, all the evidences in the defence of the Catholic doctrine ; that you found them unanswerable, and that you entertain a confident hope that, with the assistance of divine grace, you will keep with fidelity the sacred engagements which you have made. If you be still pursued by argument, and indirect insinuations be made that your refusal to enter into any discussion is a sign that you are sensible yourself of the weakness of your cause, do not be moved, nor attempt to refute the bold assertion ; own with candour that you might be at a loss how to answer sophisms and intricate reasonings, because you are not habituated to argue and dispute, but that it would be in vain to try and hope to inspire you with the least doubt, and still less to carry conviction into your mind, and persuasion into your heart ; and without showing any sign of being teased or displeased, express with a smiling countenance, that the dining or drawing room is not a fit place for such serious and important discussions : then speak of other things with your usual amenity and cheerfulness.

If some of your female friends seem to be quite in earnest, and sincerely desirous to be instructed, and for this purpose ask you privately to help them in their inquiries, comply without difficulty with their pious wishes; lend them the books the most proper to remove their prejudices, and give them exact notions of the Catholic faith. Let them have full liberty to communicate to you all their thoughts. Listen to their most frivolous objections and ill-grounded suspicions with an unwearied patience and sweetness of temper. Then answer them with simplicity, gently showing them how much misrepresented our doctrine has been, encouraging them to pray to God with great fervour, in order to obtain the lights of the Holy Ghost, adding with humility that they ought to address themselves to a Catholic priest more able than you are to solve and dissipate their remaining doubts or difficulties. If your zeal be not crowned with success, be extremely careful not to show them the least retraction of friendship, alienation, or discontent; treat them with more than usual kindness, and submitting all to God, hope for better times. The continuance of your good proceedings towards them, will add a great weight to all that you have said. God will make the good seeds which you have sown in their hearts take root, and bring forth fruits of a solid conversion, and perhaps at the moment you had lost all hope. Let it be what it may, you have done what Christian friendship required of you. Be persuaded your zealous endeavours to contribute to the salvation of their soul, will not be without reward in this life and in the life to come.

True charity inspires with sentiments of meekness, benevolence, and support towards those who are so unfortunate as to wander away in the paths of error or vice. But through an inconceivable blindness, it sometimes

happens that good people feel for, and show to sinners, but harshness or contempt. Instead of being moved with tender compassion at, and bewailing their misfortune, and beseeching the Father of mercies to have mercy on them, they consider it as a duty to shun their company, even when there is no danger of seduction, as if they were attacked by a contagious disorder; coldly pitying them, as if their loss were irretrievable, or censuring them with asperity and bitterness, as if charity always inexorable to sin, should never be indulgent to the sinner.

But who are we to prescribe limits to the mercy of God? Why should we despair of the salvation of our brother? Since divine grace could overcome our resistance, and subdue our corrupt propensities, why should we not expect that the same miracle will be operated in favour of others? How do we know that those, who to-day are so hostile and inveterate against the truth, countenance by their authority or talents, all sorts of attacks, even calumnies against the church of Christ, and seem to be the apologists of relaxed principles and immorality, will not be another day at the head of all pious undertakings, the defenders of the Gospel, the most zealous advocates and supporters of its doctrine and maxims, and the brightest examples of all Christian virtues? Who would have foreseen, that Manasses, who had introduced the abominations of the heathens into the Holy of Holies, and done his utmost to destroy all the worship of the true God in Jerusalem, would be the restorer of the temple and sacrifices, and the protector of the ministry of the sons of Aaron? I go still further: how do we know that that sinner whom perhaps we are tempted to look upon with horror, will not be called and elected, whilst we shall ourselves be rejected? He may recover life, whilst we who are now



standing may fall never to rise again. It could never have been thought that Magdalen so much despised on account of her profligate life, would become one of the most illustrious, faithful, and devoted disciples of Jesus Christ, that St. Paul, "breathing out threatenings against the disciples of the Lord, would be a vessel of election to carry his name before the Gentiles, and kings and children of Israel" (Acts ix. 15); and that Judas whom this divine Saviour had himself chosen to be the partner, the confidant, and the minister of his merciful views for the salvation of mankind, whom he had loaded with the most tender marks of friendship and preference, and who had even worked miracles in his name, should have turned a traitor, and died in despair; God alone knows the hearts of men. Let us adore with profound respect his eternal and unsearchable counsels on their present as well as their future destiny. In sinners, and those who hold erroneous doctrines, let us always respect the rights which his divine grace will one day exercise over their will to promote their sanctification; and, if obstinate in their errors or wickedness, and wilfully and perversely resisting his inspirations, the use he intends to make of them for the instruction, trial, and merits of the just.

When you see, therefore, some of your friends still living or dying, in sentiments which you cannot help condemning, do not give way to melancholy reflections or hopeless forebodings; redouble your prayers in their behalf, and remit their cause into the hands of our merciful God. The secret springs of the human heart are impenetrable to our limited understanding. With regard to those who err there may be some latent obstacle which has prevented the light from penetrating into their mind, some incurable disease which no human abilities could remove and cure. How far the desire of

knowing the truth, the resolution of embracing it, were sincere, whether the resistance to it were wilful or insuperable, it is not in our power to discover and judge. Let us only be always thoroughly persuaded that God is infinitely good and infinitely just; those who will be condemned shall be compelled to acknowledge the justice of their doom, and to declare in the presence of the whole world that they had all the means of knowing the truth, and their blindness was wilful and deliberate. There may be individuals who, through invincible or inculpable ignorance are externally united to sects condemned by the only true Church, and yet by the grace of baptism, the innocence of their lives, and the sincere and upright dispositions of their heart, are internally united with it. Religion allows to hope that there may be, and there are such individuals, but that this or that person is not of the happy number charity and prudence do not permit to pronounce. We ought to believe as an indubitable truth, that there is but one true church that inherits the promises of Christ, and that this church is the Roman Catholic Church; consequently that in order to be saved we ought to be members of it; but we must reject as unprofitable and dangerous all conjectures with regard to the future destiny of individuals. Hence, if we must do our best to banish painful and useless anxieties, yet we ought not to remain indifferent respecting the sentiments of those who are attached to heretical communions; in the ignorance of their interior dispositions, and in the awful uncertainty in which it is impossible not to be concerning their eternal concerns, as long as they live; charity commands us to neglect nothing which may be conducive to their conversion.

In all the relations of society and neighbourhood, which you are not allowed to break off, humility, meekness, condescension, forbearance, must regulate your

sentiments, words, and actions. In our intercourse with our fellow-creatures, haughtiness, a presumptuous confidence in our own judgment, positiveness in our decisions, and impatience and ill-humour when contradicted, are defects sedulously to be avoided. It is not to his apostles only, but to each of us also, that our Saviour said, "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart." Meekness is a most amiable quality, but when it is only the effect of a natural disposition it is often liable to degenerate into weakness; that it may be a Christian virtue, and lasting, it must be grounded upon humility. An humble man is always meek, though accidentally and through surprise he may be betrayed into some blunt and sharp answer; but he will never be guilty of sourness of temper and want of moderation towards others, which are the baneful results of pride. To acquire humility must be therefore the object of our earnest prayers and constant endeavours: two things united together will procure it to you. The first, a thorough conviction of your own weakness and natural tendency to evil, which would draw you into a thousand faults and even grievous sins, were you not at every moment guarded against yourself by the omnipotent hand of our most merciful God. The second, an habitual presence of this infinitely just Being who is all, and to whom all is to be referred. Thus you will learn to annihilate yourself under his awful majesty, and be insensibly delivered from that self-seeking, and complacency to which we are so prone, and which are the greatest impediments to the establishing of true humility in our souls, and his influence on our actions.

A Christian who is enlightened by the Spirit of God, never expects to find perfection in creatures. He knows that it exists in him alone, and says as the archangel St. Michael did, "Who is like God?" *Quis ut Deus?* He

is never disappointed when he discovers imperfections in men, as well as in every other creature, they only make him say, Thou art not my God. He loves God and his gifts in the good, according to the degree of their respective goodness, he loves less what is less good, and more tenderly what is more worthy of love. His affection is extended to all, because there is no one entirely destitute of some little good which is God's gift, he does not even exclude the wicked, because they may become good by receiving the gifts from which they are deprived. In short, he loves for God, all that is the work of God, and what he commands him to love. In mortal parents he beholds the heavenly Father, in a spouse, a brother, a sister, a relative, a friend, and acquaintances, the connexions which God himself has formed; the nearer, closer, and more tender, the more effectual he has learned that it is the will of God they should be; and it is his happiness to accomplish this adorable will.

The more advanced in virtue a Christian is, the more inclined he is to bear with indulgence and longanimity the defects of others; impatience and ill-humour in supporting them; to censure them with severity, contempt, or with an air of superiority and mockery, betrays a soul full of herself, blind to her own miseries, and guided by that secret pride that seems to enjoy a sort of pleasure at the sight of the faults of others: a disposition equally hateful to God and man.

Be of an easy, gracious, and inviting access to every one, without distinction of rank or fortune, without haughtiness to your inferiors or dependants, and pretensions with your equals, "with honour preventing one other"—Rom. xii. Doing your best at all times, and in every circumstance to be the same. Evenness of temper is a virtue esteemed and loved by all men, but alas! very few possess it; unevenness of temper is on the

contrary universally disliked, because it is attended with defects incompatible with lasting peace and comforts, and always produces unpoliteness and disregard of decorum and propriety, and yet it is very common. Generally speaking women are more liable than men to unevenness of temper. Perhaps it is because they are of more lively, volatile, and susceptible disposition; reflect less, have not those serious occupations which require a strong application of the mind, and when borne in affluence or a high rank, been indulged and flattered in their whims and inconsistencies. Let the cause of it be what it may, it is extremely prevalent in our days, and under the soft name of *nerves* it is the source of much variance and uneasiness between friends, and renders the person attacked with it a painful burden to herself and insupportable to others. Nervous disorders, now so frequently spoken of, may be sometimes the effect of a diseased or weak constitution. But one can say, without exaggeration, that half of those nervous ladies have no other malady than effeminacy, a great fund of self-love, ill-humour, and caprice. Their soul is more dangerously ill than their body; to teach them not to indulge all their fancies would be more effectual to restore their health than all the remedies and abilities of the most skilful physicians. This observation is so very true, that among women who are obliged to work for the maintenance of their families, one very seldom hears of *nerves*; although it must be acknowledged, that in order to imitate the predominant fashions, women of a low condition, who are peevish, irritable, or ill-natured, say now that they are nervous.

There is as much variety in the characters of men as in their features, therefore in our intercourse with them it is not rare to feel, without being able to give an account of it, a natural inclination for some and an an-

tipathy to others. To entertain such unreasonable feelings would expose ourselves to frequent and great mistakes, and sometimes to commit a real injustice. Appearances are deceitful and not blindly to be relied upon. Endeavour to regulate your feelings as well as your connexions by the principles of a sound reason enlightened by faith. Avoid to judge without necessity the conduct of others, and let the consciousness of your own failings prevent you from being over delicate and severe. In all things in which the order of Providence does not oblige you to judge, suspend your judgment. The habit of deciding on the merit or unworthiness of other people, is contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. "Judge not that you may not be judged."—Math. vii. 1. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own lord he standeth or falleth."—Rom. xiv. 4. Do not yield to the first impulsion with regard to those whom you have an occasion to see frequently; act with prudence and discretion. I need not tell you that on no pretence whatever ought you not to admit into your society people of an equivocal reputation. A woman is generally judged by the characters of her acquaintances. It is not enough for her to be without reproach, she must besides be particularly upon her guard, lest through levity or carelessness she should expose herself to suspicions.

One of the surest means not to be disappointed in our relations with our fellow-creatures is to seek and to expect very little from them. We must take from them what they give, as we do from trees, the fruit which they produce; never forgetting that there are trees that bring forth leaves and caterpillars only. God bears with the imperfections of men; he is even not tired to bestow his graces upon them in order to overcome their resistance. Let us imitate this admirable patience and

merciful forbearance. It seems to me that your heart wants to be dilated ; your natural vivacity and delicacy render you rather susceptible and too eager for the correction of people who do wrong. I confess that you cannot help seeing defects when they are striking and flagrant, and that it does not depend upon you to prevent the thoughts, judgments, or suspicions which involuntarily arise in your mind respecting the conduct of others ; provided you be always willing to support with patience the defects which are really existing, and which it is not in your power to correct ; provided you never take upon yourself to declare as certain those that are doubtful, and be determined never to show any dislike or repugnance to see the people who displease you, without having given you any solid reason for your antipathy ; that is enough. "Leave the rivers," says Fenelon, "to flow under the bridges erected over them. Leave men to be men ; that is to say, weak, vain, inconstant, deceitful, presumptuous, and unjust. Leave the world to be the world ; your most zealous efforts to to change it, will be to no purpose. Leave men to act according to their temper and habits ; you will not alter their nature. The best is to leave them alone. Be prepared to meet often from most of them unreasonableness, prejudice, and injustice. Do not take notice of their discourses ; do not rely upon the duration of their friendship. They come and go away to come back the next moment, and again run away. Be not surprised, do not give way to grief, they are like feathers carried off here and there by every gust of wind."

You will even sometimes discover real and very unpleasant defects in virtuous people. God permits it for their good and for ours:—for their good to entertain in them a spirit of humility and self-abasement ; for ours to afford us an opportunity of exercising charity and

forbearance ; as to attempt to correct those defects, great prudence and precautions are to be used, waiting till God opens the way, and clearly admonishes us to try little by little to eradicate them ; otherwise, by an over zeal one might be exposed “ in trying to gather up the cockle, to root up also the wheat with it.”—Matt. xiii.

23. Persons of an enlightened piety, convinced of the necessity of giving a salutary advice, always add to the authority of acknowledged virtue, the holy artifices of a tender and prudent charity. They know, it is true, that it is commanded “ to be instant, or reprove in season and out of season.”—2 Tim. iv. 2. But they have also learned, that “ if all things are lawful, all things are not expedient ” (1 Cor. x. 22) ; that the wounds of the heart must be treated with great skill and precaution, and that in moral diseases, to render the remedies efficacious, one ought to neglect nothing to make them acceptable to the sick. Experience has taught them, that almost always truth owes its victories to the prudent management of charity ; there is a time to be silent as well as a time to speak. It would be an egregious mistake to think that there is charity in a bitter and indiscreet zeal, that corrects without discernment, and condemns without indulgence. This amiable virtue is exempt from temerity and harshness ; guided by the Spirit of God, she lays hold of the most seasonable time to give advice, without exposing the remonstrance to be odious : when she is predominant, mildness and discretion are her faithful attendants ; if she be destitute of these lovely characteristics, it is no longer charity that reprehends and edifies, it is peevishness, ill-humour, and pride which censure and scandalize. The prophet Nathan did not, all at once, and bitterly reproach David with the crime he had committed. Before he reprehends he gently insinuates himself, and by an ingenious parable, he inspires the king with the love of the truth, before he attempts to



declare it to him; and with the hatred of the crime before he names the criminal. Thus he found out the secret of correcting the sin without offending the sinner, and compelling the king to pronounce against himself.

In proportion as you advance in virtue you will discover more vice and extravagance in the world than you do now; but this melancholy discovery will neither surprise nor scandalize you,—you will see corruption in men as water in the sea. The world, extremely relaxed in its principles and morals, is particularly severe in its judgments. Do not imitate the world. Exact in the performance of your duties, be compassionate towards sinners after the example of our divine Saviour; charity that hates the sin, yet bears with the sinner. Moreover, we ought not to believe that a man is entirely depraved because he has been guilty of some criminal actions. Justice, as well as charity, forbid such a decision. In many occasions it might be false. When we see some of our fellow-creatures falling into a heinous crime, let us pity human weakness, and reflect on our own. Thus we shall find within our heart a fund of indulgence which will become a second nature; because we shall feel at every moment that we stand also in very great need of forbearance and compassion. Solid piety derives benefits from every thing which she sees in good actions, examples to follow; in bad ones, dangers to avoid and precautions to take. Were you to search into the secret cause of that hateful malignity with which some people judge their neighbour, you would see that it proceeds from a refined pride. Their judgment of his conduct always includes an open or secret comparison with their own; they are clearsighted about his smallest imperfections, in order to show that they are exempt from them. This uncharitableness produces two bad effects; the first respecting themselves, which is to commit often

a more heinous sin than that which they reprove ; the second, with regard to religion, because it affords thereby a specious pretence to worldlings, to calumniate piety : as unjust as wicked in their remarks, they affect to confound the defects of devout people, with the practice of devotion, and charge upon religion itself the vices and errors of those who externally appear to keep its observances with greater exactness. Thus piety receives injury from those who, by their examples, should cause it to be respected and loved. I would I could imprint in your heart and mind, in indelible characters, that nothing is more injurious to virtue and piety than that sourness of temper and censorious disposition, which is too often met with in pious people. Nothing contributes more effectually to divert persons well inclined towards the Catholic Church from entering into the right road, and furnishes them a more plausible pretence to continue to wander away in the paths of error. Virtue ought to appear with so lovely, so winning an aspect, that those who behold it should wish to bear some resemblance with what attracts so much their admiration. There is nothing the good Christian has to avoid with more circumspection than the danger of rendering virtue contemptible, nor should any pains be spared to give it a pleasing and attractive appearance. For, in the common course of human events, the love we feel for the good and virtuous, disposes the heart to virtue ; and, by a parity of reasoning, the contempt we experience for those who are adorned with virtue will be, by an easy step, transferred from their persons to their laudable qualities. Their virtue will be misrepresented, it will become in one instant, a subject of contempt, in another of hatred. (Dr. Coombs.)

In order to feel comfort in the society of our friends, and acquaintances, we must wish for nothing, be contented with

little, and bear with much; renounce all curious criticism, stifle all the vain reflections of a zealous and over delicate self-love. The more sincerely you die to yourself, the more dilated, compassionate, and forbearing your heart will be. Experiencing that you have imperfections as well as those you are acquainted with, you will feel the necessity of a reciprocal compensation and support, and always keep present to your mind that "to accomplish the law of Jesus Christ, we must bear with one another burden."—Gal. v. 1, 2. In giving advice to others,—which ought not to be attempted but after mature deliberation, remembering this admirable maxim of the *Imitation of Christ*, "that it is better to receive advice than to give it" dilute your words in milk and honey; be attentive to choose the proper time, otherwise, instead of healing the wound you run the risk of rendering it mortal. If the physicians of the body observe, with the utmost care, when a remedy is to be administered, advisers ought to be still more careful how and when to use remedies for the cure of the more complicate diseases of the soul. If the advice contains blame, before you give it, examine whether you are not more actuated by some motive of bitterness and resentment than by a pure sentiment of charity. In the first supposition, all you could say, would be more the result of animosity than zeal, of wrath than mercy; and thus you would do to yourself a great injury. As for the incorrigible, feeling what a difficulty you have to correct what is still defective in yourself, you will support with patience.

With all these precautions and this amiable charity, do not flatter yourself that you will escape contradictions, rash judgments, and censures. What will appear to some truly estimable and praiseworthy in your conduct, will be a subject of blame, and turned to ridicule by others. Did not, among the Jews, some of them say

of our Lord, "He is a good man, and others, No; but he seduceth the people."—John vii. 12. Go on with simplicity and steadiness in the road which has been pointed out to you, without deviating from it, either to the right or the left. The opinions or judgments of men cannot hurt you. Were the faithful practice of your duties to draw down upon you the sneers and raillery of some worldlings, represent to yourself that Jesus Christ has been exposed to the insult and mockery of a weak judge, a corrupt magistracy, and the lowest rabble. After having endured so much to please the world, and conform ourselves to its unreasonable maxims and ever-changing fashions; is it not right that we should have something to suffer from its injustice, in order to atone for our criminal weakness and condescension? It would be, indeed, showing a jealous and inordinate desire of a vain reputation, to be afraid of and grieved at the idle talk of men, whose blindness we are perfectly acquainted with, and whose opinions we despise. "Son, take it not to heart if some people think ill of thee, and say of thee what thou art not willing to hear. Thou oughtest to think worse of thyself, and to believe that no one is weaker than thyself. If thou walkest interiorly, thou wilt make small account of flying words. It is no small prudence to be silent in the evil time, and to turn within to me; and not to be disturbed with the judgment of men. Let not thy peace be in the tongues of men; for whether they put a good or a bad construction on what thou doest, thou art still what thou art. Where is true peace, and true glory? Is it not in me? And he who covets not to please men, nor fears their displeasure, shall enjoy much peace."—Im. of Christ. Oh! happy, a thousand times happy is he, who does not listen to the suggestions of self-love and to the discourses of men.

The better thou disposest thyself for suffering, the

more wisely dost thou act, and more dost thou merit, and thou wilt bear it more easily; thy mind being well prepared for it, and accustomed to it. Do not say, I cannot take these things from such a man, and things of this kind are not to be suffered by me; for he has done me a great injury, and he upbraids me with things I never thought of; but I will suffer willingly from another, and as far as I shall think fit to suffer. Such a thought is foolish, which considers not the virtue of patience, nor by whom it shall be crowned: but rather weigh the persons and the offences committed.”—Imitation of Christ. Moreover, were we always to receive from every body testimonies of esteem, consideration, and love; were all our opinions adopted, our requests granted, our wishes anticipated; where then would be the occasion of practising patience, humility, condescension, self-denial? When shall we accomplish the commandment of Jesus Christ? “I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. For, if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not the publicans do this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathens this? Be you, therefore, perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.”—Matt. v. 44—48.

When we are obliged to vindicate our character against unjust accusations or calumnies, we must do our utmost to preserve calmness and moderation in our defence, avoiding, with care, to exhibit in our countenance any sentiments of rancour, bitterness, or animosity against our accusers. As we should have no other intention but to justify ourselves, all that which is not conducive to that

end, must be laid aside, having never recourse to recriminations and injurious words. When we clearly see that our lawful apology will inevitably bring contempt and odium against the informers, Christian charity commands to use all the palliatives and correctives which can be consistent with justice and truth. In our speech as well as in our countenance, such a spirit of mildness, forbearance, and forgiveness must breathe, as to show that we are actuated only by a sense of duty; that we seek no revenge, and desire nothing but to manifest the truth, and compel, if possible, our accusers to acknowledge their faults, and induce them to wish for a reconciliation. Such are the rules which religion gives, and which reason itself, divested from passion and prejudice, will always approve.

Although you would be very sorry to give offence to the meanest individual, and are naturally disposed to oblige every one. Yet I have remarked that you are inclined to raillery, and without intending any harm, that you seldom miss the occasion of making people laugh, by some delicate epigram, and witty representation of the oddities and ridiculousness of others. Yet, I should betray your confidence, were I not to tell you without disguise that it is a mischievous propensity which cannot be reconciled with the spirit of the Gospel, and, consequently, that you are, in duty bound, to resist it with all your power. To this I encourage you, and so much the more, that in spite of your best resolutions, you will frequently be exposed to the danger of yielding to the temptation; most of your habitual acquaintances judging very erroneously that there is no sin to enliven the conversation at the expense of their neighbour, provided his fortune or reputation be not injured by the jest; but it is a frivolous excuse invented to palliate a shocking vice. I know that it is blended sometimes with amiable qualities, and

when set off by the powers of wit and humour, that its malice is often disguised. The engaging form under which it is presented, so easily stifles the remorse of conscience, that our attention is diverted from the many fatal, and often irreparable consequences with which it is always more or less pregnant. Instead of listening to the applause, and looking with complacency at the smiles of those who hear us, were we to descend into our hearts, and interrogate ourselves whether we should like to be the objects of those jests and witticisms, which we consider so harmless when they regard others, we should be compelled to acknowledge that our feelings would be very much hurt; and that we could not esteem as our friends, the persons who would allow themselves such liberty with respect to our feelings. Now, as we are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves, and never do to others what we should be sorry would be done to us (for this is the law and the Prophets); can we say with truth, that we fulfil this precept, when we take pleasure in things which vex and afflict our fellow-creatures?

Respecting detraction, we must be particularly attentive in our conversations with our intimate friends, and put a guard of circumspection around our lips; because under the idea that we are speaking to friends, to whom we are accustomed to communicate all our thoughts, we may, without being aware of it, transgress one of the most important precepts of Christian morality. To a pious, discreet, and trusty friend, we are authorized to unbosom our whole soul. We may, without scruple, make him know all that concerns us, our joys, griefs, doubts, perplexities, temptations, and faults. "Trust thy cause with thy friend," says, the wise man; "for, as ointments and perfumes rejoice the heart, the good counsels of a friend are sweet to the soul."—Prov. xxv. 9; xxvii. 9. But,

concerning others, we are not permitted to impart to him our minds, suspicions, conjectures or judgments. It is only in case we should want advice that such a confidence could be allowed ; and then, prudence and charity must dictate what we may discover of their defects.

Never reckon in the number of your real friends, those who are always ready to praise and commend all your words or actions. Flattery is a sweet poison, which insensibly penetrates into the heart, and will occasion a slow death. Alas ! the most virtuous are not always free from its influence. Be persuaded that those who will have the courage to admonish you of your mistakes or faults, are your true and best friends. Receive their kind admonitions and gentle reproofs with gratitude, and beg of them to continue with you this office of charity and real friendship. " Better are the wounds of a friend, than the deceitful kisses of an enemy."—Prov. xxvii. 6. Had you even enemies who from jealousy, dislike, or other bad motives would reproach you with real wrongs, turn their enmity to your advantage, by correcting what was found faulty or defective in you.

Situated as you are in the world, it will come within the circle of your social duties to receive and return visits. It is a painful subjection, and a great loss of time. However, with proper management and prudence you may thereby gain much merit. The greatest danger of these visits is, that they are apt to fill up the mind with trifles and vanities. To avoid it, the best means would be to introduce or turn the conversation with unaffected dexterity upon useful subjects, and no one is more likely to succeed than you ; yet, with all your mental accomplishments, you must expect to hear a great deal of nonsense. And what is worse, one may catch the infection. By dint of hearing people talking, as of things of value, of dress, furniture, equipage, beauty,



riches, and relating with the approbation of the company the anecdotes and idle tales of the day, unless we endeavour, by solid reflections, to counteract the effect of these vain conversations, our mind will lose its natural energy, be incapacitated for applying to serious occupations, and being raised to the meditation of the divine perfections, or the awful concerns of eternity; and by an inevitable consequence, the tender feelings of piety will be dried up; the sweet exercise of prayer will become tedious and irksome, and by insensible degrees the most essential duties of religion will ultimately be neglected. In such worldly intercourse with our fellow-creatures, there is a continual interchange of fallacious compliments, affected kindness which the heart belies, and which habituate to hold a language which every one knows not to be the expression of real sentiments, but of reciprocal deceit. Thus, the communications of men with each other, which, if properly conducted, would afford innocent pleasures, useful information, and might prove so many powerful inducements to goodness and virtue, are become by their abuse, a subject of disgust to the wise and pious, and to the frivolous and worldly-minded a daily occasion of many faults.

I am very happy to find that your actual dispositions perfectly coincide with my way of thinking, and that your indispensable relations with the world inspire you with a greater dislike of all its vanities, and with a more ardent relish of retirement and your family-duties. Continue therefore to annihilate under the majesty of the Supreme Being, all the too human feelings which may have occasionally arisen in your heart in your intercourse with others, humbly begging his pardon for the faults which you may fall into, as well as for those which you have witnessed, saying with the royal prophet, "from my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord; and from those

of others, spare thy servant.”—Ps. xviii. 14. “ Fables have been told me, but not as thy law.”—Ps. cxviii. 85. I said, the faults you have committed ; because, being of a lively and cheerful temper, and your engaging manners and open countenance disposing hearts in your favour, you may be indulged and entertained in many little defects which would be judged blameable in others. Give me leave to observe to you, that nothing is so dangerous as to obtain the approbation and praises of the world ; because it is a seducing temptation to gratify self-love, which may imperceptibly lead to conform to its abuses. Be therefore upon your guard, and when you are praised, remember that before God the heavens are not pure, and that he discovers blemishes in his angels. In the bustle of companies, endeavour often to recal yourself to his divine presence. Whilst others are doing their utmost to draw upon themselves the attention of the company, retire for a few minutes into the solitude of your heart, to commune with God ; the most frivolous conversations will furnish you with an abundant matter of pious reflections and fervent ejaculations. But of this inward intercourse nothing ought to appear in your countenance ; you must not behave in society, as you would do in the church or your closet ; it would be a ridiculous and very reprehensible affectation. The eye of the soul may be lifted up towards the sovereign good ; a desire of the heart, an act of faith, hope, charity, or any other virtue may be wafted up to the throne of the Almighty, without any one about you being able to take the least notice of it ; “ for man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart.”—1 Kings xvi. 7. This holy practice, I particularly recommend to you.

In order to behave in conversation with that propriety and decorum, which ought to be attended to ;

the first is, not to strive to speak when one has nothing to say. It is much better that the conversation should flag and languish than be forced and constrained. The second, to express our thoughts or feelings with simplicity and moderation. The third, not to speak of ourselves, either to our own advantage or detriment, without a real necessity. The fourth, not to engross the whole conversation, nor show any sign of impatience and weariness at the long and insignificant speeches of others. We are so much prepossessed by self-love, that we are apt to think, that the things with which we are deeply affected, make the same impression upon others, whilst, if politeness permitted them to speak their mind, we should soon perceive that, instead of listening with interest to our relations, they are on the contrary, tired to death at the useless length of all those details on which we enlarge upon, and dwell with so much complacency. There is a great truth, and which ought to be the subject of serious consideration in the following passage of the *Imitation of Christ*: "We think sometimes to please others by being with them, and we rather disgust them." But let it be observed that this reserve ought not to be formal, pedantic, or influenced by pride or contempt for others; but dictated by regard, deference, humility, and attended with sweetness and amiability.

I have often remarked that the people whose society is more relished, are not the most learned and witty; because generally they are too apt to imagine that, on account of the superiority of their talents, they have an indisputable and exclusive right to speak in preference to any one, and that all their opinions and decisions should be adopted as incontrovertible truths; whilst those who are of a modest and unassuming character, and leave every one at liberty to say what they think,

although much inferior in capacity and accomplishments, are nevertheless always pleasing and acceptable guests and companions. I have been acquainted with a gentleman who had nothing striking nor very attractive in his manners, and who spoke little, although he was well informed; yet he was a great favourite with every one. There was but one voice to praise his gentleness, goodnature, gentlemanlike behaviour, and even his great learning; it was said he knew a great deal more than he chose to display. I wondered at first, and could give no account how he had obtained such a high and general approbation; but, upon more serious reflection, I found that he had the art of making those he conversed with show forth the different knowledge in which each one excelled. Thus to a soldier he furnished an occasion of speaking of his campaigns; to a sailor, the foreign countries he had visited, the shipwrecks he had escaped; to a man of letters, the various authors he had read, or the works he had published; to a country gentleman, the improvements he had made in agriculture, and the comforts of a country life, &c. &c. Thus by asking few questions, and making few observations which were always to the advantage of the speaker, every body was delighted with him, and he was judged not to be in the least deficient in the various accomplishments of which others thought themselves to be in full possession. Mentioning to him one day how highly esteemed and beloved he was in such company, he answered me with a smile, "All that you say does not inspire me with a better opinion of myself. I know too well what I am to attach the least value on these fine encomiums. I will tell you my secret: my great merit consists in affording to others a fair opportunity of showing their own. Indeed, a man who has many imperfections, but who does not seek to give them an

advantageous colouring; who does not affect talents, virtues, or refined manners; who does not appear to be occupied with himself, is always sure to please notwithstanding his defects; for nothing is so amiable as an unaffected simplicity that seems to have entirely forgotten itself; nay, the faint image of it is sufficient to gain the heart of others. On the contrary, if a man who is adorned with the most splendid talents and exterior graces, and even whose virtue cannot be called in question, be stiff, formal, ceremonious, saying the best things with affectation, and peremptoriness, as conscious of his superiority; his society is more avoided than sought after. Therefore there is nothing so desirable and praiseworthy, as to act with simplicity and to be unoccupied with one's self.

There is a simplicity which is a defect, and a simplicity which is an admirable virtue. Simplicity is often a want of discernment, and an ignorance of the usages of the world, and of the regard due to each one. When in the world one speaks of a *simple* person, one means always a person of a limited understanding, credulous, and destitute of a liberal education. But the simplicity that is a virtue, is far from being ignorant, unpolished, or narrow-minded. It is attended with the most amiable qualities, it renders to every one what belongs to him, it is truly sublime. All people of a sound judgment love and admire it, they perceive and feel immediately when themselves or others have departed from its rules, and when it ought to be put in practice; yet it would be rather difficult to give an exact and adequate definition of it. All that can be said with propriety is, that "it is better to feel it than to know its definition," as the *Imitation of Christ* says of compunction.

Simplicity is a rectitude of the mind, an uprightness of the heart, that retrenches all useless reflections upon

ourselves and our actions. It differs from sincerity, which is a virtue much inferior to it. One meets frequently with people who are sincere, without being simple. They never say any thing but what they think to be true. They do not wish to be esteemed better than they are, but at the same time they are in a continual dread of passing for what they are not. They are always studying themselves, measuring their thoughts, words, and actions, reflecting with solicitude on all that which they do or say from the fear of doing or saying, or from having done or said too much or too little. Such people are sincere, but they are not simple; they are not at ease with others, nor others with them. In their whole carriage, there is nothing free, ingenuous, natural; one would prefer persons less perfect, and less composed and formal. The judgment of God is the same: he does not approve those souls that are continually taken up with themselves, standing with anxiety as it were, before a looking-glass, in order to arrange and adjust their internal as well as their external motions with a refined symmetry. A modest liberty proceeding from self-forgetfulness, filial love, and an unbounded confidence in his forbearance, goodness, and mercy are much more acceptable to him.

But you say I am assailed by a crowd of thoughts and reflections, which trouble, disquiet, tyrannize, and make a deep impression upon me, how can I then help being occupied with myself? I answer that this occupation being involuntary, is not a defect, and cannot be imputed to you; for in all that which does not depend upon us, we are exempt from blame. You ought only never to entertain with full deliberation and consent, those jealous and troublesome reflections; reject them with fidelity, as soon as you are sensible of them, but without an anxious eagerness—they will insensibly dis-

appear. A continual effort to repel all involuntary thoughts respecting our feelings or concerns would be a constant and dangerous occupation of ourselves, which would render them more teasing and durable, and ultimately tend to divert us from the presence of God, and the accomplishment of our duties.

Is it never allowed in conversation to speak of oneself and one's concerns? By no means: we should never put ourselves under such a painful and almost impracticable constraint. Were we to stick with scrupulosity to the resolution of speaking in no circumstance whatever, either of our own person or interests, by endeavouring to be simple, we should act against simplicity. What then is to be done? Not to adhere to a strict silence with respect to ourselves, as to an invariable rule; but to avoid all sorts of affectation. True simplicity is equally remote from false modesty and unreasonable shame, as from ostentation and self-sufficiency. When tempted from secret self-love or complacency to speak of what may redound to our praise, we ought to resist and despise the suggestion, by a short aspiration, or by fixing our thoughts on what we have to do. When prompted to speak from some good reason, not to perplex ourselves with long examinations, but to do it with simplicity. What will be thought of me? If I speak, I may be suspected of a silly and ridiculous self-love. Perhaps I shall fatigue others by the recital of my concerns; perhaps I shall be actuated by vanity, &c. &c. All such useless and anxious reflections ought to be looked upon as mere temptations, and entirely disregarded. When circumstances require it, let us speak of ourselves as we would do of strangers. St. Paul speaks often of himself in his Epistles: he says that he is born a Roman citizen; that he has nothing to reproach in himself; even that he has been ravished to their hea-

ven, &c. &c. There is much grandeur in speaking of oneself with this admirable simplicity. St. Paul says of himself the most sublime things, without exhibiting the least emotion, as if he were speaking of events which had taken place two thousand years before he was born. But particular circumstances, and unquestionable necessity could only authorize an humble Christian to imitate the apostle's example, in thus praising himself. It is also to be remarked how careful St. Paul is to counteract what he had said to his own advantage, by the recital of his weakness and temptations. Therefore, when compelled to speak of ourselves, let us beware of being influenced either by scrupulosity, or an affected modesty secretly dictated by vainglory; for there are people who have the delicacy of not showing themselves what is good and estimable in their character or actions, and yet are very glad that others should discover it; which in reality is nothing but a more refined pride, in order to enjoy both the praise of their virtues, and the merit of hiding them.

In order to know when and how to speak of ourselves, Christian prudence requires that we should take advice from the person who is perfectly acquainted with our actual circumstances, turn of mind, temptations, and natural propensities. Thus we shall avoid the danger of being judges in our own cause, which is a source of blessings. As for unforeseen occurrences, when we have neither time nor opportunity of consulting, let us raise our heart to God by a short prayer or aspiration begging of him to let us know his will; then let us do without hesitating what at the moment seems to be the best, for hesitation would puzzle and perplex the mind without any beneficial results—we must decide ourselves. With this previous disposition, were we to be mistaken, the mistake will not be laid to our charge; the purity



of our intention, the sincere desire of doing what was most acceptable to God, will be our excuse with him ; for in his divine mercy he will not condemn us for what we may have done in the simplicity of our heart, and when destitute of proper advice, having followed what we thought to be the impulse of his divine Spirit.

As for speaking to our own disadvantage I shall not take upon myself to advise or to blame it altogether. When it is done from pure motives, sincere humility, real contempt of ourselves which God has inspired, it is undoubtedly entitled to praise, and it is by this rule that we must judge the conduct of so many saints who spoke of themselves as if they were the worst of sinners. But in general, the safest for most Christians is not to speak of themselves either favourably or unfavourably, without necessity, for there is sometimes a great illusion in those self-accusations : self-love is not rarely the secret motive of them. This observation a daily experience confirms. How many times have we not seen those very persons who spoke of themselves as the refuse of mankind, incapable of bearing the least reprehension or reproof without exhibiting much vexation, and making use of every means in their power in order to vindicate themselves from the most insignificant failings ? Now, had they been thoroughly persuaded that they were full of faults, would they have wondered and been hurt at being admonished of some slight defects ? Is not such excessive sensibility a sign that their inward feelings did not agree with their words ; simplicity may now and then appear a little careless or inconsiderate ; but, examined with attention and pure eyes, it will exhibit a candour, truth, ingenuousness, mildness, peace, cheerfulness, and innocence, which add a fresh lustre to virtue, and render its influence sweet and attractive.

## CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.

It seems to me that the observations which I have laid before you in my last letter respecting the line of conduct which you ought to follow in your daily intercourse with the world, have raised in your mind some doubts which you wish me to remove, by answering the following questions :

*First question.*—Can charity be reconciled with that diffidence which is sometimes necessary to entertain in our relations with our neighbour ?

*Answer.*—We must distinguish the general relations which charity commands us to entertain with our neighbour without exception of persons, from those particular and more intimate connexions which we wish to form with some individuals, and whom we intend to treat as bosom friends, and in this quality to open our heart without reserve. Our relations with the first do not require that previous and careful examination, which the second most positively prescribes. I ought not to think evil of my neighbour if he has not given me unequivocal motives of suspicion ; but I ought not to put an entire confidence in him, unless I have evident proofs that he is entitled to and deserves it. I entertain a favourable opinion of all those of whose vices I have no certain knowledge. But I trust only in those of whose uprightness and virtues I cannot have the least doubt. As long as I have no solid reasons for judging unfavourably of my brother, my judgment respecting him can be nothing else but a presumption ; and then it ought to be to his advantage. But in order to form safely an intimacy with him, intrust him with my secrets, and rely upon his advice, a mere presumption of his worth is not sufficient ; his wisdom and discretion must be well known

to me. I need not to examine the conduct of the generality of men; but it is of the highest importance for me not to be deceived or mistaken with regard to the qualities of those in whom I can confide without danger; charity, which forms my union with the first, induces me without examination to judge them favourably; but prudence, which ought to guide my intimacy with the second, prompts me to inquire with sedulous attention into their character and morals before I put myself into their hands. Thus I fulfil two obligations: I do not judge my fellow-creatures with inconsideration and rashness, and I do not trust in them without mature deliberation and great caution. I discharge my duty towards them by my favourable presumption in their regard, and what I owe to myself by choosing my friends with prudence and discernment.

*Second question.*—What must I do when I hear people of merit, and enjoying the reputation of being veridical speak ill of their neighbour? Is it then wrong to think within myself that things are really such as I heard them related?

*Answer.*—St. Francis of Sales in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*, has resolved the first part of the question in the following words: “When you hear any one spoken ill of, make the accusation doubtful, if you can do it justly; if you cannot, excuse the intention of the party accused. If that cannot be done, express a compassion for him, divert the discourse, remembering yourself, and putting the company in mind, that they who do not fall, owe all the thanks of it to God: recal the detracter to himself by some mild way, and speak some other good things of the party offending, if you know of any.”

The rules given by the above decision may serve to answer the second part of the proposed question. Al-

though the person whom we have heard speaking ill of another, enjoys the reputation of strictly adhering to truth in the account which is given of things, yet we ought not to be eager to judge inwardly that they are exactly as related ; because he or she may have been deceived, or not have taken sufficient precaution to inquire into and ascertain the truth. A melancholy experience affords daily instances of persons incapable of wilfully calumniating, yet who, from want of circumspection and prudence are reporters of calumnies. Therefore from these considerations, or from others similar to them, one may, and perhaps one ought to look upon as doubtful the ill which we heard reported of our neighbour, and of course we should never permit ourselves to judge him guilty. If it be quite out of our power to call in question the truth of the report ; either because we have been witnesses of the fact, or the evidences produced are beyond controversy ; we should not give way to trouble or uneasiness of mind, provided we have not been wilfully the occasion of the detraction. In this case there is no harm in knowing or seeing a thing that is really true, though it may be to the disadvantage of our neighbour. But there occurs a fair opportunity of forming inward acts of charity, which St. Francis of Sales teaches us in these words : “ If one action could have a hundred faces, we should always look upon that which is the fairest. . . . A just man, when he can no longer excuse either the action or the intention of him, whom otherwise he sees to be virtuous, nevertheless will not judge him, but puts the remembrance of it out of his mind, and leaves the judgment to God.”—Introduct. to a Devout Life. These rules are applicable to relatives and friends, as well as to strangers ; and we should be so much the more attentive and careful not to deviate

from them respecting the former, as we are, according to the order of Providence, united to them by closer and dearer ties.

*Third question.*—When interrogated with regard to the character of persons whom we know and ought to know, can we speak of their secret faults or defects with which we are perfectly acquainted ?

*Answer.*—When interrogated, as is specified in the above question, one is authorized to mention the faults or defects of our neighbour, when that disclosure or manifestation is necessary to prevent the person who interrogates from receiving a real injury. Thus if an acquaintance of yours has an intention of taking N. as a servant, you can, if you be quite certain of it, say that he is not to be trusted because he is addicted to thieving or drinking. A father has cast his eyes upon a young man to appoint him preceptor to his son. If you have a positive knowledge that the individual is destitute of sound principles, pure morals, or subject to such defects as might be greatly injurious to his pupil, you may act in the same manner ; nay, charity well understood compels you to do it, if your silence would be the cause of a considerable damage to the person who has consulted you. But one ought at the same time to be particularly careful to speak with great circumspection, spare the guilty as much as possible, and disclose only what is necessary to guard that person against the danger, to which otherwise he might be exposed.

*Fourth question.*—What is to be done when we hear people speaking disadvantageously of governments, ministers, or other personages at the head of public affairs, and who are notoriously known to be the promoters of unlawful or unjust actions ?

*Answer.*—The solution of this question we find in the abovementioned work of St. Francis of Sales. The

holy prelate expresses himself in the following words, and such are the rules which he gives with the modifications which he thinks may be lawfully adopted:

“Every one takes the liberty to judge and censure princes, and speak ill of whole nations, according to the diversity of affections they bear them. Philothia, keep off from this fault; for besides the offence to God, it may bring you into a thousand quarrels.”

According to this rule one ought to forbear speaking of governments, sovereigns, or their ministers, without necessity; especially when we live under their authority as subjects. One should besides avoid bringing the conversation on such topics. If we cannot help hearing them ill spoken of in our presence, nor change the discourse, the best thing which we can do is to remain rather passive, or say in a gentle manner a few words, in order to allay, if possible, the heat of political discussions. If, two hundred years ago, such precautions were judged necessary by St. Francis of Sales, they are indeed much more so in these days, when a spirit of innovation is moving on with the most rapid strides through all the nations of the civilized world, the principles and basis of civilization, good order, civil and religious liberty are become objects of discussion among all classes of society, and the most contradictory opinions and systems maintained with equal zeal and apparent conviction. Hence it is not rare now to meet people of great merit, distinguished talents, and animated with a sincere desire to promote the general good, at variance with one another, which has been too often the cause of opposition, dislike, breach of friendship, among the most intimate friends and members of the same family.

Women's province as well as duty is to espouse no party; to be neither whig, tory, nor liberal, but angels of

peace, and to use the sweet influence which God has granted them over the other sex, to make men lay aside and forget at home in the peaceable enjoyment of domestic pleasures, the warmth and bitterness of political debates, and to reconcile minds which the diversity of opinions always tends to alienate. Thus, women will gain great merits, because they have like men their particular view of things, and may sometimes have the most solid reasons to differ from the sentiments of those whom they are bound to love and respect, and will thereby have many occasions of practising self-denial, humility, forbearance, and condescension. However, continues St. Francis of Sales, "it is true, that of infamous, public, and notorious sinners, one may speak freely, so that it be with the spirit of charity and compassion, and not with arrogance and presumption, nor to take complacency in the evils of others; which latter is always the part of a mean and abject heart. I except amongst all the declared enemies of God and his church, for those we may cry down as much as we can, such as sects of heretics and schismatics, and the ringleaders of them. It is just to cry out against the wolf when he is among the sheep; yea, wherever he is." Yet one must observe, that this exception is not applicable to sovereigns to whom we have taken an oath of allegiance, or in whose dominions we live under the protection of the laws; we ought not, without doubt approve, or connive at the evil which they do, or the erroneous opinions which they hold; but on account of the fidelity which is due to them, it is never allowable; how public, and notorious soever their vices or defects may be to render them odious or despicable to their subjects, from the fear of alienating from them the hearts and minds, and thus drawing down the greatest calamities upon them and their kingdoms.

*Fifth question.*—What is to be done when, hearing of calamitous events, one feels sentiments of indignation against those who are the authors of them, or those who do not prevent them, when it is in their power to do so? Is it lawful, in the anguish of the heart, to speak unfavourably of these persons, though at the same time one most sincerely wishes their conversion? Can we lend a willing ear to the discourses of others against such persons?

*Answer.*—When we hear the account of calamitous events, it is natural to feel inward sentiments of indignation against those who are, or whom we consider the authors, or those who did not prevent them when they could. These inward emotions are not sinful; they arise within us independently of our will. The royal prophet said, “I beheld the transgressors, and pined away, because they kept not thy word.”—Ps. cxviii. 158. But in such circumstances we must, 1. Do our utmost to calm these inward feelings, lest by indulging them, they should degenerate into hatred, or wilful consent, which then would be sins against charity. 2. Beware of judging rashly that such persons are really the authors of the events which so painfully affect you; or that they do not use the power in their hands to prevent them. 3. Forbear as much as possible, to speak of them, such discourses being useless and dangerous: useless, because they cannot afford any remedy to the existing evil; dangerous, because by keeping afflicting thoughts in the mind, we expose ourselves to the danger of exciting and entertaining bitterness and rancour against our neighbour, and of committing thereby grievous sins against charity. 4. When we hear such discourses, the best and usually the only thing to be done, is to endeavour to stop them. 5. Be careful not to fall into the fault mentioned by St. Francis of Sales. “Now, though we must be extremely tender in



point of speaking ill of our neighbour, yet must we take heed of an extremity into which some fall, who to avoid detraction, commend and speak well of vice. If a person be a detractor, say not to excuse him, that he is a frank and free speaker. If a person be notoriously vain, say not that he is genteel and neat; and never call dangerous familiarities by the name of simplicity or innocence, nor disobedience by the name of zeal, nor arrogance by the name of freedom, nor lasciviousness by the name of friendship. We must not think to avoid the sin of detraction in such a manner, as to favour, flatter, or cherish other vices; but we must roundly and freely speak evil of evil, and blame that which is blameable; for in so doing we glorify God, provided we observe the following conditions: To speak against the vices of another commendably, it is necessary that the profit either of him of whom we speak, or of them to whom we speak requires it. Besides, it is also requisite, that it belongs to me to speak on this subject; as when I am one of the chief of the company, and that, if I should not, it would look as if I approved the vice. For, if I be one of the least, I must not take upon me to speak. But above all, it is necessary, that I be exactly just in my words, that I may not say one single word too much; I must hold the balance so even, as not to make the matter heavier, no, not one grain. If there be only a weak appearance, I will say nothing more; if but a mere indiscretion, I will give it no worse name; if there be neither indiscretion nor real appearance of evil, but only that some malicious spirit may take from thence a pretext to speak ill, either I will say nothing at all, or say that same, and no more. The blow I shall give must be so just, as to be neither more nor less than the truth."

The same holy bishop, in another part of his works,

marks out the line of conduct which is to be held with detractors when it does not belong to us to reprehend them. "In the conversations to which you cannot avoid being present remain in peace whatever may be said. If it be good, there is a fair opportunity of praising God; if it be evil, you may still serve and honour him, by averting your heart from it, without showing surprise or ill-humour, since you cannot help it, and have no sufficient authority to command silence to those who are determined to slander, and who will still do worse, if they imagine that one tries to hinder them from gratifying their bad inclination. Thus you will remain innocent and safe, in the midst of the hissings of the serpents."—Let., b. ii. let. 19.

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## XVII.

### OF FRIENDSHIPS.

The chief motives and the only foundation of almost all connexions or friendships in the world, are inclination, cupidity, and vanity. Inclination.—The generality of men, in forming connexions with their fellow-creatures, are actuated by a certain natural propensity, which, finding in some particular persons more conformity with their own inclinations, and perhaps also more condescension and indulgence for their defects, disposes the heart to a closer intimacy, and makes them enjoy in their society a liberty and comfort, which most usually ends with a dislike for the company of other people. There are also too many selfish characters that seek only in friendship, utility and advantage; as long as their friends can be useful to them, and promote

their interests or procure their pleasures, they are entitled to their warmest affection. Alas! interest, is the great attraction and the secret spring which gives motion to the affections and conduct of most men. We are sure of having friends, when it is in our power to pay with generosity those who love us. Vanity.—It is not uncommon to meet with people who are influenced in their attachments by no other motive, but the idea that their friendship for such persons in particular will redound to their honour and glory: they imagine that by their intimacy with them they will enter into a participation of the high distinction which they enjoy, and though conscious of their inferiority of merit, yet they glory in their society, in order to make others think, that at least they are not far remote from their splendid accomplishments, because we love only those who bear some resemblance with our qualities and dispositions.

That such selfish sentiments, such a vile egotism, cannot be called a real and especially a Christian friendship, I need not tell you, nor guard you against their influence. The bare mentioning of them will be sufficient to inspire you with disgust and contempt. But are we doomed, in the various and too often distressing occurrences of this transitory life, to be for ever deprived of the consolations and support of friendship? And when we are so happy as to find some persons, whose principles and feelings sympathize with our own, does religion forbid to form an intimacy with them? That from the beginning of the world, down to our days, there have been but very few instances of pure, disinterested, virtuous, and lasting friendships, cannot be denied; but as the word of God is infallible, and as he assures us, in the Holy Scriptures, that “a faithful friend is the medicine of life and immortality, and they that fear the Lord shall

find him" (Ecclus. vi. 16.), I entertain a confident hope that, guided as you are by the sole desire of improving in virtue and pleasing God, you will, in case of necessity, find that precious treasure. "He that feareth God shall likewise have good friendship; because, according to him shall his friend be."—Ecclus. vi. 17. Yet, not to be disappointed, you must not raise your expectations too high, nor exalt your imagination by the romantic ideas of a perfection and never-fading delights incompatible with human weakness, and this state of trial and probation.

Among the people who call and consider themselves as our friends, there is a distinction to be made. There are some, whose attachment, though not dictated by vicious and selfish views, is still but very superficial. We ought not to rely much upon their fine protestations of devotedness, nor claim their services without an urgent want; but, as far as it depends upon us, we must serve them with such readiness and affability as to make them sensible of our obliging dispositions in their regard. These people may not be endowed with striking attainments. Provided they be virtuous we must not seek for any thing else, be satisfied with them, such as they are, and confine ourselves in the ordinary commerce and occurrences of life, to kindness and civility. One visits them at their home, and meets them in the society of friends or acquaintances, when decency and decorum require it; but one ought to evade their parties of pleasure, and never give them one's confidence. If they express a desire of greater intimacy, it must be evaded by gentle and delicate excuses: To-day, one is particularly engaged; to-morrow it is an unforeseen business that cannot be postponed, and such like.

As for bosom friends, they must be chosen with the utmost precaution, and of course they will be very few.

You should never choose for an intimate friend a person destitute of the fear of God, and whose conduct is not directed by the pure maxims of religion ; otherwise, whatever may be her good and her amiable qualities, she might be the cause of your ruin. Choose, as much as you can, for your intimate friends, persons a little more advanced in years than yourself, it will be a great help for your progress in virtue. With true and prudent friends, let your heart be upon your lips ; keep no secret from them, excepting the secret of another, and those things respecting which you have reason to think them not quite exempt from prejudice. Be tender, zealous, disinterested, and constant in friendship ; but not blind with regard to the defects or the different degrees of merit of your friends. Let them be assured always to find in you a ready disposition to assist and comfort them in the days of distress ; and never let their misfortunes or afflictions diminish in the least your interest and affection for them. It is not so in the world ; alas ! with the generality of men, *les malheureux ont toujours tort*. “ He that is a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is proved in distress.”—Prov. xvii. 17. “ Keep fidelity with a friend in his poverty, that in his prosperity thou mayest rejoice. In the time of his trouble continue faithful to him, that thou mayest also be heir on his inheritance.” Ecclus. xxii. 28, 29. Do you wish for true and sincere friends ? Seek them in God, who is the sole author of pure and eternal friendships. Remain silent in the bosom of him who is the Word, the life and soul of all those who speak in his name, and lead in him a spiritual life. In him you will find all that is deficient in yourself, and besides all that is but very imperfect in the creatures to whom you have given your confidence.

“ Have no friendship,” says St. Francis of Sales, “ but with those that can communicate with you the things of virtue ; and the more exquisite the virtues are,

which shall be the matters of your communication, the more perfect shall your friendship be. . . . If your mutual and reciprocal communication have relation to charity, devotion, and Christian perfection, good God ! how precious will this friendship be ? It will be excellent, because it comes from God ; excellent, because it tends to God ; excellent, because its very bond is God ; excellent, because it shall last eternally in God. Oh ! how good it is to love on earth as they love in heaven ; to learn to cherish one another in this world as we shall eternally do in the next. I speak not here of the simple love of charity ; for we must have all that for all men ; but I speak of spiritual friendship, by which two or three or more souls communicate to one another their devotion, their spiritual affections, and make themselves but one spirit. Such happy souls may justly sing, ‘Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.’—Ps. cxxxii. 1. For the delicious balm of devotion distils out of one of their hearts into the other by a continual participation ; insomuch, that it may be said, that God has poured out upon this friendship ‘his blessing and life’ for evermore. Make no other kind of friendship but this. I speak of such friendships as you make ; for you must not, therefore, forsake or neglect the friendships which nature or former duties oblige you to cultivate with your parents, kindred, benefactors, neighbours, and others ; I speak of those which you choose yourself.

“Many, perhaps, will say, that we should have no kind of particular affection and friendship, because it occupies the heart, distracts the mind, and begets envy ; but they are mistaken in their way of thinking. . . . For such as are among worldlings, and who embrace true virtue, it is necessary for them to unite themselves by a holy and sacred friendship ; for, by these means, they encourage, help, and lead one another to good.”

A virtuous friend, who unites to virtue that mildness and discretion which Christian friendship always inspires, will never find the heart of his friend insensible to the sweet and tender representations of zeal. He is not an austere anchorite, who might be considered as a stranger to the weakness of our nature, and unacquainted with the dangers and duties of the world, of course, as not being a competent judge of what is to be indulged or condemned ; and therefore he cannot be suspected of exaggeration or unseasonable severity. He is a just man born in the same condition as ours, of the same, or near the same age, exposed to the same temptations, and who may have experienced the wide difference of the enjoyments of the world from the pure and peaceable delights of a virtuous life. This similarity of position and circumstances gives to the simplicity of his discourses a greater influence than the most splendid eloquence could ever do. Truth acquires new titles to our hearts, when it is presented to us and attended with the sweet and sincere persuasions of friendship. It has been said, with great propriety, that a virtuous friend is a second conscience. "It is better, therefore, that two should be together than one, for they have the advantage of their society ; if one fall he shall be supported by the other."—Eccl. iv. 9. "St. Thomas," says St. Francis of Sales, "speaking on this subject with all the good philosophers, acknowledges that friendship is a virtue. And he speaks of particular friendship ; since, as he says, 'perfect friendship cannot be extended to many persons.' . . . The Holy Scriptures speak with praise of the friendship between David and Jonathan: 'The soul of Jonathan,' they say, 'was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.'—Kings xviii. 1. No one, surely, will deny, but that our Lord loved with a more sweet and more

special friendship, St. John, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, for the Scripture witnesses it. St. Gregory Nazianzen boasts a hundred times of the incomparable friendship he had with the great St. Basil, and describes it in this manner: 'It seemed that in the one and in the other of us, there was but one soul dwelling in two bodies. .

\* . We had both of us one only pretension to cultivate virtue, and accommodate all the designs of our life to future hopes: going, in this manner, out of this mortal earth before we died in it. St. Austin testifies that St. Ambrose loved St. Monica entirely for the real virtues he saw in her; and she reciprocally loved him as an angel of God. St. Jerome, St. Austin, St. Gregory, St. Bernard, and all the greatest servants of God, have had very particular friendships, without any prejudice to their perfection. Perfection, therefore, consists, not in having no friendship, but in having none but such as is good, saint-like, and holy."—Intr. to a Devout Life, xix.

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## XVIII.

### AMUSEMENTS AND RECREATIONS.

It is a principle of Christian morality, that having renounced on the baptismal fonts, the world, its pomps, pleasures, and vanities, the true Christian ought not to seek amusements or diversions for their own sake. In order to prevent their being injurious to him, he must really be in want of them; make use of them with moderation, as of necessary things, and not with the eagerness and fondness of one who fixes all his affections on them. Now, as relaxation and amusements can be useful, only when they are conducive to relieve the mind from too long or close application, and recruit the strength of the



body exhausted with labour and fatigue, it is evident that recreation and amusements are allowed only when they can promote this happy end. Hence, walks, music, reading, drawing, riding, &c. &c., or other innocent amusements cannot be indulged ; but with the same motives we take our daily meals, viz., to enable us to accomplish with ease and cheerfulness our domestic and social duties. There is much wisdom in the French popular saying, *Il faut manger pour vivre, et non pas vivre pour manger*, and which may, with great propriety, be applied to many other things than eating and drinking. But not to ground my sentiments upon a profane maxim, I shall bring in the irresistible authority of St. Paul, who says, that “ they that use this world, ought to use it as if they used it not: for the fashion of this world passeth away.”—1 Cor. vii. 31.

The length of time which can without inconvenience be allotted for recreation, with regard to persons living in the world, cannot be positively fixed, as it may be done in a school or a convent; the various avocations and unforeseen occurrences of social life, do not permit such a precision. Much depends on the age, health, and particular situation of each individual. What is inevitable, and even may be necessary for one, would be quite needless, or reprehensible in another. For instance, a married woman who is bound to comply with her husband's inclinations and wishes, in all that is not contrary to the law of God ; who, by her rank or fortune, is at the head of a large establishment, and obliged to receive numerous companies, and entertain them during their visits, cannot regulate nor limit the time which she may give to these usages of the world, as a single lady who is quite independent, at full liberty to shut up her door, and remain quiet in her apartment as long as she likes, without being exposed to be accused of acting against

the rules of decorum, no one having the least right or motive to find fault with her conduct. "To use well innocent recreations," says St. Francis of Sales, "there needs but that common prudence, which gives to every thing its due order and time, place and measure. . . . St. John the Evangelist, as Cassian says, was one day found by a huntsman with a partridge in his hand, which he made much of by way of recreation: the huntsman asked him, why he, being such a man as he was, would pass his time in a thing so low and so mean; and St. John said to him, 'Why dost thou not carry thy bow always bent?' the huntsman answered, 'Because, if it should be always bent, I should fear lest it might lose all its force, and become useless.' 'Wonder not, then,' said the apostle, 'if I sometimes remit a little of the close application and attention of my mind, to take some small recreation, that I may afterwards employ myself more fervently in divine contemplation. It is, doubtless, a vice to be so rigorous, rude, and savage, as neither to be willing to take oneself, nor to allow to others any manner of recreation.' . . . Take heed that you set not your affection on any of those things; for howsoever any recreation may be, it is a vice to set the heart and affection upon it: I do not say that you must not take pleasure in it whilst you are at it, for then it would be no recreation; but I say you must not set your affection upon it, long for it, seriously employ yourself about it, and be eager after it."

To play at cards is a recreation generally in use, and it would be carrying to an excess the severity of moral principles to forbid it in all circumstances. "It is lawful in itself," says St. Francis of Sales; "only all excess is to be avoided either in the time employed in it, or in the sum that is played for." The first condition is to play fairly, and although neither gain nor loss could be the

result of your play, never to indulge yourself to cheat. All sorts of deceit and unfairness, even in the most insignificant things, is irreconcilable with uprightness, and noble and generous sentiments. In case of any gain being obtained by any unfair means, justice strictly enjoins an adequate restitution. The second, never to play high; for whatever your fortune may be, and though by the loss you may incur, you should only lose what is called *superfluous*, and do no kind of injury to your family; yet you must never forget, that that which you call, and is in reality superfluous, is the patrimony of the poor. The third, if when at play you feel yourself habitually actuated by cupidity and pride, or prone to impatience, ill-humour, or anger, you must avoid playing as an occasion of sin. But you have asked me, whether it be allowable to play at games in which the gain chiefly depends upon hazard. In all the games now in vogue in the world, there is always some chance or hazard; and one does not see any solid reason why the one would be more unlawful than the others. There are, however, some which are very justly forbidden, on account of the large sum of money which the player is usually exposed to gain or lose. But supposing that the persons engaged in such games, should seek for nothing else, but a mere recreation, and that the loss or gain should be but a trifle; it seems that such games cannot be more sinful than the others; but it must be well understood that they are not prohibited by the laws; for I am persuaded that civil laws, when not in opposition to the principles of sound morality, or the precepts of the Gospel, oblige in conscience. And even for recreation's sake, and in the greatest secrecy, I could never approve of a game which is forbidden by lawful authority. It does not belong to a private person to scrutinize the sense of the law, and to decide according to his private opinion whether it be

obligatory or not ; he must be guided by the judgment of the generality of the most learned and virtuous people. A general law of a kingdom obliges all the subjects, and no other exceptions can be admitted, but those specified by the lawgiver himself. I have known people who gave to the poor the money which they won, and to make up for what they had lost, deprived themselves in a spirit of penance, of some little conveniences which otherwise they might have procured to themselves without scrupulosity. These rules and principles respecting playing at cards, I have literally translated from the work of a most learned and pious author. Abbé Clement's *Maximes pour se conduire chrétiennement dans le Monde*.

In few words this is the rule to which I advise you to adhere. To play only to relax your mind from serious application, and when the persons whom you are obliged to see and receive wish for it—playing at cards without eagerness, passion, or any prospect of considerable gain or loss, is sometimes a useful preservative against distraction and unprofitable discourses. “ Play, when to condescend and comply with the desires of the company in which you are engaged, and partake in an innocent amusement ; and as prudence and discretion shall direct to do it. For condescension, as a branch of charity, makes indifferent things good, and dangerous allowable. It even takes off the harm from those things, which might in some degree be evil ; and therefore games of hazard, which should otherwise be reprehensible, are not so, if we use them sometimes by a just condescension.” —St. Francis of Sales.

“ Dances and balls, in their own nature, are things indifferent.”—St. Francis of Sales. For young persons of the same sex and age, it may be useful and harmless exercise ; but according to the ordinary way that it is

used, especially when persons of different sex meet together, it very much bends and inclines to the side of evil, and, consequently, is full of peril and danger. Balls generally take place in the night. A cautious reserve is laid aside; a certain liberty of looks and actions, which elsewhere could not be indulged, is apparently authorized there. Every one strives to appear in the most advantageous light; vanity and an inordinate desire of pleasing, insinuate themselves unperceived into the heart. The heat of the room, the influence of musical instruments act upon the senses and the imagination with an almost irresistible power; and it is not rare that a young person who went to the ball innocent as a dove, and entirely disengaged, returns home with a certain unaccountable disquietude, and vague feelings of tenderness with which she was unacquainted before, and which are too often the prelude of dangerous affections. That a married woman, the mother of a family, should feel the need or the desire of exchanging the pure and peaceable enjoyments of domestic life, and the sweet and innocent diversions of her children, for the fluttering and tumultuous merriments of a ball-room, and the noisy and frivolous intercourse with people who are strangers, or indifferent to her, and most of whom perhaps she does not esteem or care for, betrays in her a want of judgment, a levity of character, and a fondness for trifles, baubles, and vanities, which cannot redound to her commendation and praise. As for public and masked balls, a woman who sets some value on an unblemished character, will never be seen there herself, nor suffer her daughter to be present at them. I conclude by the decision of St. Francis of Sales, by the wisdom and authority of whom I like to be guided: "I say to you of dances, Philothea, as physicians say of mushrooms, the best of them are good for nothing. And I tell you

the best of balls are good for nothing. Nevertheless, if, by some occasion which you cannot well put off, you must go to a ball, see that your dancing be properly accommodated; viz., with modesty, dignity, and a good intention. Dance but little, and very seldom; for doing otherwise, you put yourself in danger of taking an affection for it. . . . But above all I say, that after dancing it is necessary to use some good and holy considerations, to hinder those dangerous impressions which the vain pleasure taken in dancing may have left in the mind." I shall not enter into the detail of the pious considerations which might be suggested to you on the subject, I leave to you the choice of them. As you are animated with the love of God, he will himself inspire you with such as circumstances may require, in case you could not dispense yourself from assisting at a ball.

Music exercises a most powerful influence upon our hearts. Tunes and airs have some affinity with the affections, as merry tunes, doleful tunes, solemn and sacred tunes, tunes inclining men's minds to pity, and warlike tunes; so that tunes have a predisposition to the motion of the spirits. It is related of Alexander the Great, that, when a particular warlike tune was played before him, he involuntarily and immediately laid hold of his arms with eagerness, jumped upon his horse in the attitude of a fierce warrior attacking an enemy, and when the peace tune was played, he assumed a mild and sweet countenance, and let his arms drop from his hands. There is a particular rustic tune much used in Switzerland (called "*Le Rang des Vaches*"), which describes in a very plain but affecting manner, the domestic occupations, and rural sports and amusements of that country. In whatever part of the globe its inhabitants may be settled, whenever they hear this tune played, it makes

so deep an impression upon them, that they become insensible to the happy situation in which they may be placed, and makes them sigh after their native mountains, and pine away for their return to them: so that in the Swiss regiments serving in a foreign land, it was strictly forbid to play that tune, in order to prevent the soldiers from deserting their colours. It is also reported of the celebrated Dr. Johnson, that having one day heard the *Dies iræ* sung in a Catholic chapel, he thought himself to be summoned before the awful tribunal of the Sovereign Judge, and could not help melting into tears. The practice of music, therefore, is not a matter of indifference. That songs or tunes tending to convey to the mind improper thoughts, inflame the imagination, or excite in the heart dangerous feelings, should be for ever excluded, no one will call in question; yet one is surprised to hear well-educated and virtuous women, singing airs expressing or indirectly alluding to things which they could not hear without a blush, if they were mentioned in plain terms before them, and still more so if they could be suspected to be animated with the sentiments too obviously hinted at in the song. Simplicity, custom, purity of intention may in some circumstances render it excusable; yet it would be rather difficult to reconcile it with the exhortation of St. Paul to the first Christians—"Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts. . . . Let his word dwell in you abundantly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing with grace in your hearts to God."—Col. iii. 15, 16. Yet not to fall into any exaggeration, I shall translate for you the advice which Fenelon gave to a nobleman who had consulted him on the subject.

"As for the airs of opera music, it is for you to appreciate what an impression they may make upon you; I

say, *they may*, for although they make none at certain times, they may do it at other times, and expose you to temptations. Supposing that these airs produce no bad effects, it seems to me that you might sing some of them, but without pronouncing the words, which by themselves are insipid enough, and in the pious dispositions in which you are, cannot be pleasing to you. There is another rule which you should observe, viz., not to sing those airs within the hearing of people, who from your example might consider themselves authorized to sing them, or who might entertain wrong ideas of the sincerity of your piety, seeing you attached to those profane songs. Excepting the things which I have just pointed out to you, I wish you to enjoy a perfect liberty, and rejoice innocently; for joy is very useful and even necessary to preserve the health both of your soul and body.”—Fen. lett. 496. Such were the precautions which this learned and pious Bishop recommended to a man of mature age, living in the world and at court. What then would he have said, had he written to a woman, who, on account of the exquisite sensibility of her sex, and of the good example which she is obliged to give, ought to show by the reserve of her words, the modesty of her countenance and whole deportment; the purity of her heart and the innocence of her feelings?

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## XIX.

### THEATRICAL AMUSEMENTS.

As I am now less engaged than usual, I shall endeavour in this letter to answer your doubts respecting theatrical amusements, which it seems have been revived



in your mind by the examples of several Catholics with whom you have been acquainted in your travels through France, Germany, and Italy, and who, you say, had not the least scrupulosity in going to the playhouse. I shall not reply that the great number of those who infringe a law does not render lawful the infringement of it, if it be clearly proved that such an infringement is prohibited and condemned by the principles of sound morals as well as by the precepts of the Gospel. It is but too true, that "there is a way which seemeth just to a man: but the ends thereof lead to death" (Prov. xiv. 12); that "wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to perdition, and many there are who go in thereat."—Matt. vii. 14. The question is, to know whether a Christian who has his salvation sincerely at heart can, without sin or danger of sin, frequent plays. If not, the number, authority, and the reputation for virtue of the advocates and partakers of theatrical amusements, cannot be an excuse, or a justification before God. The thing is of the highest importance, and deserves the most serious and impartial investigation.

Can we find in the Holy Scriptures any passage upon which the liberty of frequenting plays can be authorized? I open this divine book, and I read—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like to this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets."—Matt. xxii. 37. "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me."—Matt. x. 37. "Seek not revenge, nor be mindful of the injury of thy citizens."—Lev. xix. 18. "When thy enemy shall fall, be not glad, and in his ruin let not thy heart rejoice."—Prov. xxi.

17. "I say to you love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you."—Matt. v. 44. "To no man rendering evil for evil . . . not revenging yourselves . . . If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat ; if he thirst, give him drink . . . Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good."—Rom. xii. 17. "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are the meek . . . Blessed are they that mourn . . . Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice . . . Blessed are the merciful . . . Blessed are the clean of heart . . . Blessed are the peace-makers . . . Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake . . . If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee . . . If thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee : for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than thy whole body go into hell . . . Judge not, that you may not be judged, for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged . . . Lay not up to yourselves treasures upon earth . . . but in heaven, where neither rust nor moth does consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For, where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also . . . Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart . . . Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven . . . Whosoever therefore shall humble himself like this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven."—Matt. . . . Fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints ; or obscenity, or foolish talking, or scurrility, which is to no purpose . . . Let no man deceive you with vain words : for because of these things cometh the anger of God upon the children of unbelief."—Eph. v. 3, 4. "But whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever of good fame ; if there be any virtue, if any

praise of discipline, think on these things.”—Philip. iv. 8. “Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world . . . If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him; for, all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world.”—1 John ii. 15, 16. In the words of the beloved apostle, “do not love the world:” are not all the pomps, pleasures, and passions of the world so lively represented on the stage, as positively reprobated, as if each one were nominally specified? In those of St. Paul, “whatsoever things are true, &c., think on these things:” can it be called in question, that whatever may prevent us from entertaining such holy thoughts, or inspire us with others quite inconsistent with, and destructive of the former, is forbidden, or at least ought to displease us and be rejected as dangerous? Nay, supposing that there was no sin, nor danger of sin, but merely a hindrance to sanctification or perfection in theatrical amusements, it would be a real fault, to encourage and countenance them either by our approbation or presence, since it would be acting against the precept of the divine Author of our religion; “Be perfect as your Father that is in heaven is perfect.”

Now, let me ask any person who is a sincere inquirer after truth, and who has assisted at the representation of tragedies and comedies, if the maxims and sentiments inculcated in those performances are not in direct opposition to the rules of conduct which I have just quoted out from the sacred writings? Are humility, meekness, forbearance, patience, self-denial, forgiveness of injuries, the virtues recommended in tragedies? Are not, on the contrary, pride, vainglory, impatience, anger, revenge, represented as noble and generous sentiments? Does not the drama most commonly terminate in duels,

murder, or suicide? Are simplicity of manners, innocence, contempt of the world, purity of heart, respect for parents, piety and devotion, promoted in comedies. Are not those virtues almost always hissed off the stage, or when any thing like it is introduced, exhibited as nonsense or hypocrisy? In some pieces, I own, that the highest encomiums are bestowed upon magnanimity, courage, gratitude, parental love, friendship, patriotism; whilst treachery, cowardice, ingratitude are depicted in the most odious colours: but the forementioned virtues are honourable, and the neglect of them is stigmatized even by worldlings, and of course there is no great danger of sinning against them; and the vices opposite to them are so vile, so contemptible, that there is no man so degraded as to attempt to palliate their deformity. The fact is, that in order to ensure success the stage must please the spectators, and for this purpose it must flatter the prevalent and favourite opinions and feelings of the day, which is never done more efficaciously than under the appearance of encouraging splendid achievements or patriotic virtues. What has the scene presented, at different times, in a neighbouring country, during the last forty years? Under the fair and specious name of liberty, hatred of tyranny, despotism, and contempt of superstition, with which the stage resounded, the promoters and advocates of revolutions endeavoured to justify revolt, impiety, spoliation, immorality, murder, and all the hideous and unheard-of crimes which can debase mankind. It was after having witnessed and applauded on the stage the downfall and murder of imaginary tyrants, that, carried away by political frenzy, whole populations ran with eagerness to witness and applaud, in the public squares, the slaughter of hundreds of innocent victims of every age, sex, and rank.

If the name of plays is not mentioned in the Holy

Scriptures, can it be concluded, from this silence, that our Lord, or his apostles, approved them? One might draw the same conclusion respecting the gladiators, the sanguinary games of the amphitheatre, or the wrestling of naked women at Sparta; for there is not a single word, either in the Gospel, or the epistles of the apostles concerning these horrid, cruel, and shocking amusements. But, is it not clear as noon-day, that, by condemning the world, Jesus Christ has condemned all the vices and crimes of the world, and whatever may, directly or indirectly, tend to promote and maintain them? He has established, in the most forcible and evident manner, the principles on which all morals rest; but he has left to us to draw the consequences, and to make the application of them to the various cases and circumstances.

But, if there could be any doubt respecting the application of the aforesaid maxims of the Gospel to theatrical amusements, let us consult the successors of the apostles, the most learned fathers of the church, the councils, rituals, all treatises of morality, and sermons, from Tertullian in the second century, down to our own days, and we shall find all of them censuring, blaming, and reprobating plays as the pests of souls, and the ruin of virtue and decorum. I shall not translate here long extracts from those holy and experienced personages, or this letter would swell into a large volume. I shall content myself to assure you, that their severe censures and vehement invectives against the stage and players were not merely directed against those heathen, impure, and cruel entertainments which were exhibited in their time, but referred also to tragedies and comedies, similar to those which are performed on our own theatres. It was not only the idolatry and scandalous lewdness which generally attended them which they blamed. Their reasonings

and arguments went a great deal further. In theatrical exhibitions, they reprov'd the inutility, the loss of time, the excitement of the passions so unbecoming a Christian, whose heart ought to be a sanctuary of peace; the vanity of dress, the love of pageantry, which they reckon among the pomps which we have renounced on the baptismal fonts; the unavoidable meeting, without any reasonable motive, of persons of different sex, at the great risk of being, for each other, an occasion of dangerous temptations; the excessive love of frivolous and unprofitable occupations, the improper and inordinate mirth and laughter, which is so apt to make us lose the presence of God, and the rigorous account which we shall have one day to give of all our actions and words. They blamed, in short, all that which is inconsistent with the gravity and seriousness of a Christian life. Nay, they reprov'd in plays, even those indifferent things which might be harmless in themselves, but which served only to disguise the deformity of vice under fair appearances, and more effectually introduce it into the heart. St. Austin most pathetically deplored in plays, that lively and moving description of our spiritual diseases, which revives the feelings of our passions, and makes us shed, involuntarily, floods of tears:—in fine, that illusion which intoxicates, and which he calls, with much reason, a downright madness. In the midst of these strong emotions, and under the impression of such an overflowing of various, and sometimes very opposite feelings, who can, said they, raise his heart to God? Who would dare affirm that he is there for his love, to please him, or, at least, in conformity to his will? In the midst of those senseless, but prepossessing, joys and afflictions, is there no danger to lose the spirit of prayer, which, according to the words of our Lord, should be uninterrupted in a Christian—at least in desire, and in the pre-

paration or disposition of the heart. "He spoke also a parable to them, that we ought always to pray, and not to faint."—Levit. xviii. 1. These reflections, and many others of the same kind are to be met with in the writings of the fathers who have treated of the stage diversions. St. Chrysostome calls them "the fuel of unlawful passions, the pomps of Satan which we have renounced;" and Salvian, "the prevarication of our faith, our creed, and sacraments." The fathers of the third council of Tours, observes, that in plays there are effeminate tunes, and external sights, all tending, by insensible degrees, to enervate the vigour of the soul, and which open a wide door to a crowd of vices. It is sometimes nothing striking; one would be at a loss to specify, in a positive manner, what particular scene or part is wrong. It is the whole which is dangerous. Imperceptible affections, weak sentiments, by gradual and unperceived means, steal into the heart; a secret disposition to feelings which exercise a powerful influence over the imagination and senses, is silently formed; one does not know precisely what is wanting; it is an indefinite and restless longing after sensual gratifications, which predisposes both the actors and spectators to indulge, without examination or remorse, that propensity to pleasure so congenial to our corrupt nature. To please, is the only end of the one, and to be pleased, of the others; and, when it can be accomplished, a complete success and satisfaction are obtained on both sides. But how the cause of virtue and good morals has been promoted or impaired is never thought of. Indeed, whoever is acquainted with the writings and the moral principles of the fathers, will readily confess that they condemn, most severely, the various motives which induce to frequent plays. Without dwelling here on all the evil and danger with which they are attended, one may say, with

truth, that the frequenters of plays seek to forget themselves in order to drive out of their minds, or shake off that almost irresistible weariness inseparable from all transitory things, which is one of the great plagues which distress human life, since man has lost the relish of divine meditations and hopes.

Perhaps it will be objected, that by strictly adhering to these principles all public and private entertainments, which are innocent in themselves, should be suppressed, because they may be the occasion of abuses: it is not the place to enter here into such examination, the solution of which depends upon particular circumstances. What was incumbent upon me to prove was, that the holy fathers were deeply impressed with the danger of theatrical amusements, and were persuaded that, besides the impropriety of indiscriminate meetings of people of different sex, the applause given to the play of the actors, and to the worldly, and too often, the loose and anti-christian maxims of the drama, and all the allurements of the passions encouraged and maintained on the stage, were an insurmountable obstacle to salvation.

It is true "that the creatures of God are turned to a temptation to the souls of men, and a snare to the feet of the unwise."—Wisd. xiv. 11. That one cannot live in the world, move a step, read a book, and even be hidden in a desert, sequestered from the society of men, without being sometimes exposed to meet with objects which may be an occasion of temptation. Well; because surrounded on all sides by inevitable perils, are we thereby authorized to increase wilfully their number? A very conclusive argument indeed! The apostle St. Paul writing to the Corinthians, admonished them "not to keep company with fornicators." But, he adds immediately: "I mean not . . . with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or the extortioners, or



the servers of idols: otherwise you must needs go out of this world."—1 Cor. v. 9, 10. Will it be then inferred from this passage, that there is no danger, no sin in seeking voluntarily, and taking pleasure in such an intercourse. If so, this great apostle was grossly mistaken, and contradicted himself when he said, "Be not seduced: evil communications corrupt good manners."—*Id.* xv. 33. And the royal prophet before him, "With the perverse thou wilt be perverted."—Ps. xvii. 27. All the objects which strike our senses, may occasionally excite our passions. Shall we therefore be allowed to prepare deliberately, and seek on purpose for objects so much the more efficacious to produce that baneful effect, that by their being disguised under the most attractive shape, are more seducing, and their influence almost irresistible. Now, can it be maintained that the plays which are composed with the greatest talent, and performed with the greatest ability, and of course which are apt to make the deepest impression upon the spectators, ought not to be numbered among "the evil communications" which "corrupt good manners!" What a blindness! What an infatuation! Oh! let us rather conclude, there are many unavoidable dangers in the world; let us not, therefore, multiply them of our own accord. Almighty God will help and preserve us safe in the temptations which it is out of our power to avoid; nay, he will never permit that we should be tempted beyond our strength, but he generally forsakes and abandons to their weakness, those who against his repeated warnings, and from their free choice, seek after temptations. "He that loveth danger," says the wise man, not he that is exposed to it from necessity, "but he that loveth danger and seeketh it, shall perish in it."

To justify their opinion the advocates of theatrical diversions say, that if they were productive of such

ruinous effects, they would not be tolerated and supported by civil laws. But all political writers are compelled to acknowledge, that human laws cannot always prevent or suppress all evils. And all divines, after St. Austin, positively declare, that the laws of the city of God, and those of the world are quite different, and sometimes at variance. During the first four centuries of Christianity the games of the amphitheatre were tolerated, and divorce was allowed by the Roman laws; yet all the fathers of the Church proclaimed in all their instructions to their flock, that those games, as well as divorce, were most peremptorily reprobated by the law of God. If, in Catholic countries theatrical amusements be not prohibited by civil laws, one ought no more to infer from that toleration, that they are harmless, than from the prevalence of many vices which they equally tolerate, that these vices are virtues. If the laws of the Church be not so severe against those who frequent the theatre as they are against the actors and actresses, it is because she considers that her condemnation of the players is an evident proof that she condemns the plays. Moreover St. Augustine remarks with great propriety, that the Church does not inflict the severity of her censures against all sinners indiscriminately. When they are very numerous she contents herself to address them the most urgent admonitions, from the fear of rendering them more criminal, were they to persist in their obstinacy and resistance, and thus turn the remedy destined to procure the recovery of their health, into a more dangerous and mortal disorder. Moreover there is ~~some~~ distinction to be made among those who frequent the stage; they are not all equally guilty; some may be more excusable than others, and perhaps there are ~~some~~ few who are more in need of instruction than deserving blame. Therefore the same spiritual punish-

ment could not be with justice inflicted upon all. If, notwithstanding the most convincing evidences of the immoral tendency of plays, the custom prevails, and they are still in vogue; all that which can be said is, that they are to be numbered among those abuses and social evils which are always condemned and forbidden, and yet never entirely eradicated.

There is nothing so common as to hear people in the world affirm in the most positive manner, but they never felt any bad impression in frequenting the theatre. That the rich who alone have it in their power to gratify their inclination for those amusements, are not more addicted to vices, nor commit oftener odious crimes, than the poor who never go to the playhouse. It must be candidly confessed that among the rich one never, or very seldom indeed, meets with pickpockets, burglars, highwaymen, thieves, prostitutes, and a very gross and offensive language; but, in the sight of Him who "searches the hearts and reins," are they less guilty? Do not idleness, effeminacy, luxury, covetousness, envy, jealousy, detraction, revenge, duelling, suicide, irreligion, ambition, excessive delicacy, and too often intemperance, impurity, indecent allusions in their words, hardness of heart, artifice and falsehood in order to escape paying their creditors, and the basest intrigues to supplant their rivals and ruin their enemies, prevail among the rich? Are those vices and crimes less odious and criminal because they appear in a fine dress, are attended with politeness and elegance of manners, and not amenable to the severity of civil laws? Alas! the poor may perhaps plead before the unerring tribunal of the sovereign Judge, as an attenuation of their depraved habits and crimes, the want of instruction, their excessive poverty, and often the privation of the necessities of life. But they who have been favoured by a good and Christian

education, who are well instructed of all their duties, and by the abundance of all temporal blessings, granted to them by a most benevolent Providence, are guarded against all the temptations to which ignorance and extreme distress and misery expose. What will they have to say in their defence? Let us not deceive ourselves. God judgeth according to every one's works without respect of persons (1 Pet. i. 17); and that "which is high to men, is often an abomination before God."—Luke xvi. 15.

Are we to form our judgment of theatrical diversions on the testimony of those invulnerable people who assure us with such confidence that they can often, and for several hours together, assist at and hear the most captivating tunes, and the most passionate and tender scenes without experiencing the least dangerous emotion, and the smallest detriment to their fervour and virtue? But whence comes that pretended passiveness or insensibility? Is it to be attributed to the innocence of the plays, and ought we thereby to conclude that they are without danger? If those people feel nothing, is it not because they are already so corrupted, that they feel no longer the influence of corrupt maxims and dangerous sights? Vice is sometimes like an impetuous and overwhelming torrent which, swelled by heavy and unexpected rains, breaks off all at once its usual bounds, and carries far and wide devastation and death; but at other times and more generally as a gentle stream, it gradually and imperceptibly filtrates by drops into the foundations of the most solid building, and undermines them; and when all appears to be secure, a sudden gush occasions a total destruction and ruin. The disorder already exists in the blood or in the bowels, before it is manifested outwardly by fever. In souls as well as in bodies there are maladies which are not

felt as yet, because they are not declared; others which are no longer felt, because they are grown habitual, or because they are extreme, and are already an anticipated death, when nothing is felt. As for those who have preserved their innocence, we shall tell them with the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, "Withstand the beginnings, after-remedies come too late." When carried away by a river, we do not feel the rapidity of the stream, unless we strive to swim against it; if we make no efforts at first, the motion may be easy and even agreeable, and we are not really sensible of the danger which we run, but at the moment of sinking and being drowned. We ought not, therefore, to believe implicitly most of men respecting their evils and dangers. Too frequently their corruption and the delusions of their imagination prevent them from seeing the misfortunes which threaten and are near at hand? They may be men of probity; their judgment and decisions may be of great weight in the concerns of this world; but I am much afraid that their probity and wisdom are like that of the wise and the prudent of this world, who have but a very imperfect knowledge of the characteristics of true virtue, and flatter themselves that they have accomplished all justice, provided they are living as men of honour, and do injury to no one; whilst they indulge, to their own loss, all their propensities, refuse to themselves nothing which may gratify their passions, and their fondness of sensual enjoyment or pleasures. It is of those *wise, prudent*, and honourable men our divine Lord speaks, when he says, "I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to little ones" (Matt. xi. 25), who are apprehensive of hearing or seeing whatever might awaken their passions, or flatter concupiscence.

It is said that the description of the passions represented

on the stage, excite them only in an indirect manner. But, whether they are directly or indirectly excited, is the excitement less dangerous? However, nothing is more contrary to truth and experience. The natural, essential, and direct end of plays; the chief and positive design of authors and actors, is the excitement of the passions. What is the aim of the composer of a tragedy or comedy, when the principal hero of the piece is a lover, thwarted in his intentions? Is it not to inspire all spectators with the various sentiments with which he is animated: to make them fear and tremble with him, when he is exposed to the danger of losing the object of his affections, and partake in his joy and happiness, when all the difficulties he had to struggle with are entirely removed, and all his wishes accomplished? If the tragic and comic authors do not succeed to make the spectator enter into the passions of their heroes, their piece falls to the ground as a cold, tedious, and insipid performance. But, I shall ask, if moving and lively impressions frequently reiterated are very proper to moderate our feelings, and help us to overcome them in case of need. Is there the least probability that the representation of the troubles which are often the consequence of yielding to our passions, will be powerful enough to counterbalance the impression and efface the image of the transports of joy and happiness with which their gratification is represented to be attended, and which the authors and actors endeavour to embellish by all the arts of poetry and delivery, in order to render their pieces more pleasing to the public?

All the passions of the human heart are sisters, one gratified is sufficient to raise many others; to try to combat one by another is a sure means of rendering us more sensible to all. It is objected that history which is so serious and grave, sometimes relates things and makes use of words which may have a remote tendency to

awaken the passions, that its end is to interest and instruct the reader by the recital of the good and bad actions which it describes. But can any just comparison be established between an historian who exerts all his abilities in relating bad actions, in order to inspire his reader with the horror and hatred of them, and the author of plays who employs all his talents to delineate in the most seducing colours, the propensities most congenial to our weak and corrupt nature. If there be any histories so far degenerated from their noble and solemn character, as to show, as it is done in plays, a design of exciting and justifying those passions, which are called delicate and soft, they are to be rejected as novels, romances, and all those productions which are conducive to weaken the principles and influence of sound morality. Immodest paintings tend naturally to imprint in the mind, the image of the objects which they represent; and on this account are justly reprov'd, because they are, or may be, an occasion of improper thoughts or feelings. How much more liable shall we not be to be moved and affected by the sight of the various occurrences of life exhibited on the stage, when the persons are not represented as on the canvass by the dry, and, as it were, the dead strokes of the pencil; but by men and women showing in their countenance, their eyes, their gestures, the accent of their voice, sobs and tears, the various and conflicting struggles of the violent or tender emotions with which they seem to be alternately agitated; and which, if the actors play well their respective part, are partaken by the generality of the spectators. To pretend, I say, that such representations are harmless, and not apt to excite the passions; that innocence and modesty are not there exposed to a blush; that a young person will hear without feeling the least emotion, a person of her own sex speaking openly of her inward conflicts

and of the irresistible power of her inclinations, and of the impossibility she is under of hiding them from the man she loves, is scarcely to be credited. Hence, what worldly decorum alone condemns—that weakness which those who are so unfortunate as to feel, are so careful never to acknowledge—a young lady will learn to disregard at the theatre from the example of the heroine of the play, who is always represented as possessing the most amiable accomplishments, a model of modesty and all virtues, and whose actions and words are applauded by the enthusiastic clapping of the hands of the whole assembly. But it is replied, that all these feelings are often exhibited on the stage as weaknesses; it may be so. But as noble, generous, natural, commendable, irresistible weaknesses, as weaknesses of *heroes* and *heroines*; as weaknesses so exalted, so artfully transformed into virtues, that the spectators return home thoroughly persuaded that it is desirable and honourable to be subject to them.

It is asserted that tragedy inclines to pity, through terror. But, what is that pity? A vain, transitory emotion which lasts no longer than the illusion which has produced it; the effect of a natural feeling soon destroyed by the first occurrence; a barren pity which draws a few tears, and which never was the parent of an act of humanity. Thus, the cruel and sanguinary Sylla shed tears when he heard the recital of the misfortunes of which he was not himself the author. Thus, the tyrant of Phœæ hid himself when he assisted at plays, lest he should be surprised sympathizing with the grief of Andromache and Priam; whilst he heard, without the least emotion, the lamentations and moans of so many innocent victims, who were every day put to death by his orders. Tacitus relates that Valerius, calumniated and accused by the command of Messalina who longed



for his death, defended himself in so moving and pathetic a manner before the emperor, that the prince was strongly affected, and that Messalina herself could not refrain from tears ; she retired to the next apartment to recover herself, after having however, and still bathed in tears, whispered to the emperor not to let the accused escape unpunished. Alas ! many of those ladies so proud of their tears at theatrical performances have not, perhaps, a better grounded sensibility of heart.

If we be more easily moved to pity and compassion at the recital of imaginary than at the sight of real misfortunes ; if the representations of the stage cause often more abundant tears than the very presence of the objects represented would do, it is because these tender feelings are without the mixture of anxiety or fear for ourselves. When people have indulged their compassion and sympathy for these fictitious afflictions and woes, they fondly flatter themselves that they have fully complied with the duties which humanity prescribes to us towards our fellow-creatures ; and they remain perfectly satisfied with themselves, without making the least alteration in their usual expenses and amusements ; whilst the presence of the truly destitute, unfortunate, and distressed would claim their care, consolations, assistance, and exertions to relieve them, which might associate them in some degree to their sufferings, or which at least would disturb their indolence and secretly reproach them for their want of generosity in their regard. Self-love is so ingrafted in our nature, that we are afraid to yield to tender feelings respecting real distress, lest by giving way to them, we should be compelled to make some sacrifice of our ease and convenience, and practise some slight self-denial. Thus, the most advantageous result or influence of the best tragedies, is confined to useless and transitory sentiments, and they produce no other effect

on the spectators, but a self-complacency in the goodness of their heart, and in their merely speculative virtues.

With regard to the passion of love, which is the main spring and the very soul of tragedies and comedies, in vain would it be alleged to justify them, that love upon the stage is divested of all that might render it sinful, that all that is unlawful or might be offensive to decency is carefully retrenched, in short that it is only a natural and innocent inclination, always terminating by marriage, that is represented upon the stage. Allowing for a moment that this assertion is well grounded, and reasoning accordingly, all the comedies in which there are, more or less, equivocations, words of double meaning, indecent pleasantries, maxims tending to authorize, or at least to palliate lies, deceits, cunning, criminal compliance in servants, disobedience of children towards their parents, and infidelities in the sacred bands of wedlock, ought to be excluded without mercy from the stage. What will become then of most of the works of your most renowned writers, of Shakspeare, Congreve, &c. &c.? Their most enthusiastic panegyrists are compelled to confess that they abound with faults and defects, not only with regard to the style, which in some passages is grown obsolete, but with respect to principles of morality. Speaking of the first, they say, "His Falstaff is universally allowed to be a masterpiece. If there be any fault in the draught he has made of this lewd old fellow, it is, that though he has made him a thief, a liar, and a coward, in short every way vicious, yet he has given him so much wit, as to make him almost too agreeable; and I do not know whether some people have not, in remembrance of the amusement he had formerly afforded them, been sorry to see his friend Hal, use him so severely when he comes to the throne. In the *Merry Wives of Windsor*,

there are some incidents which may have pleased the daughter of Henry VIII. although they are justly *repulsive* to modern taste and delicacy. Of the second, Congreve, that though he endeavoured to palliate the alleged enormity of particular passages of his plays, yet it was impossible to vindicate the general character and tendency of his pieces. In the year 1698, the Protestant bishop, Jeremy Collier, published an essay, entitled, *A short View of the Immorality of the English Stage*. In this work he attacked most of the dramatic writers of the day, with so much force and ability, that those who ventured to engage with him in the controversy, were, in the public opinion, completely defeated."—*Rees's Cyclopædia*.

Although profane love should be represented as adorned with the most virtuous qualities, whatever may be said to vindicate and counteract its dangerous influence, it is at the bottom but the concupiscence of the flesh, which St. John forbids to render amiable, since he forbids to love it. No, certainly, the dangers attending the lively description of a contagious passion, cannot be prevented by the manner in which it is set up before the eyes of the spectator. It may happen, yet very seldom, that in some plays love is sacrificed to duty and virtue, and when criminal, condemned and punished. If the heroes of some pieces be now and then exhibited as overcoming their passions, their fortitude is admired; but one compassionates and sympathizes with their weakness; one learns less to be animated by their courage, than to feel the necessity of it. It offers an occasion of practising a greater virtue; but those who are so presumptuous as to expose themselves willingly and deliberately to such hazardous combats, deserve to be vanquished. Love assumes the countenance of virtue, speaks its language, borrows its enthusiasm, and the

unwary do not perceive their error and danger, but when it is too late, and are become too weak to be able to break their chains and recover their liberty. How many young men born with generous inclinations, seduced by those alluring and deceitful appearances, from tender and virtuous lovers as they were at first, have been gradually changed into vile corrupters, without honour, morals, and the least regard to the sacred and inviolable rights of friendship and marriage. Oh! happy are those who are made sensible of their delirium on the brink of the precipice, and can escape from falling headlong into it. Is it in the midst of the most rapid race that we can hope to be able to stop whenever we please? Is it by becoming every day more susceptible of tender feelings, that we shall learn to overcome tenderness? We may easily triumph over our inclinations when they begin to be felt, but when they are grown into a habit or violent passion, who will dare, without the blindest and most criminal self-conceit and infatuation, to presume that he will always preserve an uncontrolled mastery over himself, and in the most seducing temptations always obtain the victory? There is a French tragedy, called *Berenice*, in which the Emperor Titus, after many struggles and conflicts between his tender affection for Berenice, and what he considered as his duty, is at length represented as subduing his passion and sending away that princess in obedience to the Roman laws. But I have heard people say, that it was *invitus, invitam, et invito spectatore*; viz. in opposition to the will and desires of Titus and Berenice, and of the spectators themselves. An admirable proof indeed of the powerful influence of plays to teach us to conquer our passions!

How can it be pretended consistently with the dictates of unprejudiced reason, that one may without in-

convenience or danger wait for the event, in order to know what will be the impression which we shall receive from objects the most proper to excite the passions, and that once excited we shall have always in our power to regulate, moderate, and stop their action whenever we please or think it necessary. Theatrical amusements are reprov'd not precisely because their positive and declared end is to inspire criminal passions, but because they dispose the heart to indulge too tender sentiments, which afterwards are gratified to the detriment of virtue. The soft emotions which are raised at the theatre, do not point out a particular object of affection, but are apt to make the spectator feel the want of one, and induce him to make such a choice. Thus the affections which are inspired there, are either innocent or criminal, according to the inward dispositions of each one, and those dispositions are quite independent of the examples given. Besides, is the lively and moving description of an innocent love, less alluring, less seducing, less capable of affecting a sensible heart, than the picture of a criminal attachment? The disgusting representation of vice would be, at least, a strong preservative against its influence, but the idea of innocence embellishes and seems to justify the pleasure of the impression, a short time after the innoxious circumstances which accompanied it are forgotten, whilst the effect of the feelings experienced remains deeply imprinted in the heart. If the sacred name of matrimony was sufficient to authorize the public expression of connubial love, Isaac and Rebecca, as the great Bossuet observes, would not have thought proper to keep it secret. When the patrician Manilius was expelled from the senate for having embraced his wife in the presence of his daughter, surely this action had nothing reprehensible in itself, nay it was the innocent

sign of a laudable sentiment; but the expression of it might be an occasion of improper ones in the daughter, and thus a virtuous action become an inducement to vice. In reality such is the usual, and even one may say the necessary, consequence, of the chaste love represented on the stage. The spectators return home with an interior conviction that love is an irresistible passion, to which the noblest and most courageous characters are obliged to yield. The influence of a frail and ephemeral beauty is set forth in the most brilliant colours, and with that imagery of poetry and music, so powerful to strike the senses, and penetrate to the very heart. The tyranny of that dangerous influence being so disguised, flatters the vanity of one sex, degrades the dignity of the other, and enslaves them both under the ignominious dominion of the senses. In confirmation of these observations, I might quote the most celebrated pagan legislators, philosophers, and historians, Plato, Cicero, Plutarch: "We do not receive in our city tragedies and comedies," says Plato, because he considered them as quite inconsistent with simplicity of manners, and tending to fortify those unreasonable and corrupt propensities which are the source of all the weaknesses and vices of men. He could not bear the lamentations, tears and sobs so applauded on the stage; "because," added he, "they excited and encouraged that weak and complaining disposition of our nature so liable in afflictions to pour itself out in groanings and tears." He equally censured and condemned those emotions of indignation, anger, resentment or revenge, so prevalent in plays; "because," continued he, "there is nothing upon earth, nor in human accidents, the loss of which is deserving so much grief and regret from men whose nature is so noble, whose souls are immortal, and who are destined for the enjoyment of the sovereign good. The

heathens themselves thought that a woman could not appear upon the stage without a breach of decency, and being in some degree guilty of prostitution. Before the establishment of Christianity, the Roman laws noted actors with infamy, deprived them from the title and rights of Roman citizens, and reckoned actresses among prostitutes. Cicero bitterly regrets that Roscius, the best actor who ever performed on the Roman stage, and whom he represents as a most virtuous man, should have embraced such a degrading state. In short without making the least distinction between tragedies or comedies, the laws equally branded with ignominy, all those who appeared on the stage. *Quisquis in scenam prodierit, ait prætor, infamis est.* There is an Act of the 10th of George II. by which players were classed among rogues and vagabonds. There is certainly an opinion in London, and other towns where theatres are erected, that they cause the introduction of a loose population into their neighbourhood.

Laying aside those weighty, and I think unanswerable objections against the stage, and supposing that there may be some few privileged individuals who receive no injury from frequenting it; there is an argument which has always made a deep impression upon me, and which will perhaps appear entitled to a serious consideration. We read in the Holy Scriptures that God gave "to every one commandment respecting his neighbour;"—that "we ought to love him as ourselves, and never do to him what we should be sorry would be done unto us."—Eccl. xvii. 12; Matt. cvii. 12. And therefore, as a natural consequence if we be animated with the sentiments which these maxims imply, we cannot take any pleasure in seeing him do actions which we know to be extremely injurious to his spiritual welfare, and may ultimately expose him to eternal damnation. Now, can

those, who by their presence as well as by their money authorize and encourage theatrical amusements flatter themselves that they fulfil the precept of loving their neighbour as themselves? Let us not disguise, nor palliate the truth, however unpleasant and severe it may be. The good morals of women can only be safe and secure in a retired and domestic life. The peaceable cares of a family and household concerns are their portion: the dignity of their sex consists in modesty. Bashfulness and decency are inseparable, and indicative of purity of heart, and when they seek to attract the eyes of men, they expose themselves to be suspected of not attaching a great value to that amiable virtue. If the timid reserve and modesty of the female sex are not only natural, but also social virtues, it is highly important for the good of society, that they should be carefully cultivated and maintained; and a woman who disdains to do it, sins against good morals. There is no spectacle in the world so interesting, so respectable, so delightful, as that of a mother surrounded with her children, directing with cheerfulness the occupations of her servants, procuring with unwearied attention to her husband all the comforts of a happy domestic life; in short, governing her family with sweetness, wisdom, and prudence. It is in the performance of these duties that she shows herself with the amiable and commanding dignity of her sex, and if we can be allowed in so grave a subject to hazard an idea which might appear too worldly, that beauty shares in some sense the honours and homages offered to virtue, when it is united to it. But let us rather say with the wise man, "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: the woman that feareth the Lord shall be praised; her children will rise up, and call her blessed; her husband, and he will praise her; and her works will praise her in the gates."—Prov. xxxi. 28, 29, 30, 31.



After these reflections, I shall ask, how a state of life, the sole object and occupation of which is to show oneself to the eyes of a gazing crowd, and what is still worse for the sake of money, can be reconciled with the character of modest and virtuous women, and with the imprescriptible rules of decency and sound morals? How difficult must it be, if not quite impossible, that a young woman in the bloom of life, who, in order to perform her part to her own honour and to the satisfaction of the public, is compelled to lay aside all reserve, and personate the most tender and violent passions, should never be tempted to gratify desires which she does her utmost to inspire. In spite of the greatest precautions an honest and sincerely virtuous woman, when exposed to danger, finds sometimes that it is not an easy thing to preserve her heart free and disengaged; and those audacious and rash young persons, without any other education but a system of coquetry, any other occupation but to learn the art of performing to the life the part of lovers, surrounded by a crowd of bold and immoral men, in the midst of the most seducing accents of love and pleasure, will resist the influence of their age and propensities, the discourses they hear, the occasions of every moment, and the rich offers which too often are made to them in order to seduce them from the paths of innocence and virtue. Where is the man, provided he has the least knowledge of human frailty, who will ever believe it? In vain vice strives to hide its deformity under fair appearances, it is always visible in the countenance of the vicious. The boldness of a woman is an evident sign of her shame, and if she be no longer susceptible of blushing, it is because she has too much to blush for; and if sometimes decency survives the loss of innocence, what shall we think of innocence when decency itself is totally extinguished? I shall not here

scrutinize the secrets of hearts, nor affirm that without exception all actors and actresses are destitute of morals; no—I shall not pronounce such a general sentence. I am ready to adopt the most favourable supposition; but can we esteem as honourable and without danger a state of life, in which a chaste woman is a wonder, and which, unless of a miracle, we cannot help despising, and those who embrace it. Moreover, is there a virtuous and Christian father or mother, who would suffer their daughters to show themselves in company dressed as the actresses are on the stage? Would they allow and encourage them to listen with complacency to the discourses which are held there? Would they not be shocked if they were gazed at with such indecent familiarity and boldness as cannot be prevented in a playhouse? Would they not be covered with shame if they saw them obliged to bear the affronts to which those unfortunate women are daily exposed from a capricious and often unjust audience? Who is the man of worth who will seek for himself or his son a wife among actresses? And are not such connexions, when by chance or some particular circumstances contracted, always looked upon with a suspicious eye, very seldom approved, and never proposed as examples to be imitated?

In the relations of social life a man and a woman, whose continual study would be for money to counterfeit themselves, displaying alternately the most opposite sentiments; at one time the most generous, noble, and pure dispositions; and at another, the most shocking, vile, and even criminal propensities and actions, would be held in the utmost contempt; and their acquaintance shun, as a disgrace. Yet, by an unaccountable inconsistency, this is admired and applauded on the stage. For, what is the profession of, and in what does the excellence of a comedian consist? Is it not to appear in

the afternoon quite a different man from what he was in the morning? and for the sake of money, to exhibit feelings contrary to his own, and which he would very often be very sorry to be thought really animated with? The biographers of your celebrated Garrick say, that no actor ever more thoroughly adopted for the time the characters which he sustained: his attention to propriety was uniformly supported by every look and gesture, while he continued in the sight of the audience, whether speaking or silent. Tragedy, comedy, and farce, the lover and the hero, the jealous husband who suspects his wife without cause, and the thoughtless and lively rake who attacks with design, were alike his own; rage and ridicule, doubt and despair, transport and tenderness, compassion and contempt, love, jealousy, fear, fury, and simplicity, all took in turn possession of his features, while each of them appeared in the proper occasion, to be the sole possessor of his heart; nay, though he had naturally one of the most lively and expressive countenances, he knew how to banish from it every vestige of sense, and put on the stare of stupidity. I appeal to the conscience of any one who is still sensible of the dignity of human nature; is there nothing disgraceful for a noble being to personate for the sake of money the most vicious characters? I appeal to the actor himself who represents Shylock the Jew, in the Merchant of Venice; would he be pleased if some of the spectators were to address him in the following manner: In personating the Jew, you have, sir, so naturally displayed such a deadly spirit of revenge, such a savage fierceness, and a bloody designation of cruelty and mischief, that I have the greatest difficulty to persuade myself that you were not predisposed for such hateful sentiments; speak candidly, did you not actually feel them? What do you think of such a compliment? Besides, is there nothing

contagious in the talents of those who have acquired the facility of producing so complete an illusion upon the spectators, as to affect them as lively as if they were eye-witnesses of the events represented? But if we consult the morality of the Gospel, can we think that those splendid talents which obtained for Garrick a large fortune during his life, and the honour after his death of having his remains to be interred with great pomp in Westminster Abbey, have promoted the cause of virtue and religion? When he performed the part of a lover, is it probable, that in the heat of the delivery, he never cast a glance, and experienced a feeling contrary to the caution recommended by the wise man? "Gaze not upon a maiden, lest her beauty be a stumbling-block to thee."—Eccl. ix. 5. Is it probable that the female partner remained totally insensible to the pathos of his expressions and the ardour of his countenance? It is reported in the history of his life, that a young lady of fortune fell in love with him whilst he was personating one of his heroes. How many young persons may have yielded to the same influence, and who have never been known. Instead of bewailing in secret the sinful impressions which they may have indulged, is it not to be feared that the enthusiastic plaudits of the audience may have stifled the inward upbraidings of their conscience, and left them upon their death bed still answerable for sins forgotten and never repented? In short, can those words of the apostle St. John be applied to him with a confident hope, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow them."—Ap. xiv. 13.

Players are continually exercising an art incompatible with the duties of a Christian: they are as often as they appear on the stage, in an immediate occasion of sin, and

were they to be struck with a sudden death whilst they are performing their part, their eternal salvation would perhaps be more than doubtful. Can, then, any conscientious Christian think it lawful to encourage them by his presence, plaudits, and money to persevere in such a dangerous state of life. And if it be true, as it cannot be called in question, that he who approves of, or wilfully connives at a bad action, partakes in the guilt, and that woe shall be to him by whom scandal cometh ; is it not evident that those who frequent the stage are indirectly accessory to, and the promoters of all the sins committed there ; for certainly, if there were no spectators, there would be no players ! It is reported of a princess of France that, when she was forced by the *étiquette* of her station to be present at plays, she used to keep her eyes shut ; and in the vindication of her conduct in this particular, she once exclaimed, “ How can I take delight in seeing my fellow-creatures damn themselves for my amusement ? ” Such, indeed, should be the thoughts and feelings of all those who go to the play, if faith and charity were the predominant sentiments of their heart. But the generality of men never make such serious reflections ; they have but a very superficial knowledge of religion ; they have only vague and indistinct notions respecting the full extent of its precepts, they never imbibed its true spirit. They had heard that the Catholic Church prohibits theatrical amusements, but they never took the trouble to examine what were the grounds upon which the prohibition was founded. They considered it as too severe, and not applicable to our enlightened age. They go no further ; they seek to be amused, and when they have been so, they are very careful to remove from their minds the dangers to which those who procure their pleasures are continually exposed. But can this ignorance and unconcern be a sufficient excuse in the sight

of God ? Let us, therefore, conclude that as no motive can authorize us to run the risk of defiling our souls, or to be accessary to the sins of others, the assistance at plays cannot be allowed to a Christian. If there were peculiar circumstances in which, as in the case of the princess just mentioned, it might be permitted to assist at theatrical performances, no one should presume to decide for himself, lest he should be deluded by an ill-grounded necessity ; but after having, with the greatest candour, laid his case and inward dispositions open to the guide of his conscience, he ought to refer the whole to his judgment, and abide with simplicity by his decision.\*

As for the plays which are performed in private families or houses, almost all the objections raised against the public stage are applicable to them ; for, excepting the shame and disgrace always resulting from showing oneself in public, under a borrowed and false character, for the sake of money, the inconveniences and dangers are nearly the same ; because the maxims inculcated in almost the dramas played there, are equally irreconcilable with the morality of the Gospel. Nay, perhaps, the occasions of

✻ \* “ Ne lui decidez pas qu'elle (la jeune Duchesse) ira à l'opéra et à la comédie ; et *ne vous chargez jamais de ce cas de conscience qu'elle traitera avec son confesseur* mais laissez entrer un peu d'opéra et de comédie, de temps en temps, dans l'étendue de la liberté que vous lui laisserez. Permettez-lui d'aller avec Mde. ———, ou avec d'autres personnes qui lui conviennent, et qui la meneront peut être aux spectacles. Ne faites point semblant de l'ignorer : ne déclarez point que vous l'approuvez ; mais sans affectation, laissez ces choses-là dans le train de demi-liberté ou vous commencerez à la mettre. Si elle vous en parle, ne vous effarouchez pas, et *n'autorisez rien ; mais renvoyez la à un confesseur qui ne sera ni relâché, ni rigoureux*. Elle reconnoitra tout ensemble votre piété ferme et votre condescendance pour attendre qu'elle *se désaltuse*. Voilà, mon bon Duc, ce qui me paroît ni charger votre conscience, ni celle de notre bonne Duchesse, et qui pourra toucher le cœur de cette jeune personne.—Fénelon, *Lettre au Duc de Chevreuse, Corresp.* I. p. 161.

temptations are perhaps greater. On the stage, the stigma most generally attached to the mercenary profession of public players; the opinion that many of them either men or women, are not particularly remarkable for soundness of principles, and regularity of morals, may, in some degree, lessen the influence of their play, although it is always too strong. But when the various parts of a tragedy or comedy are acted by persons of unblemished reputation, by persons of our own age, rank, and acquaintance, if the performance is done as it ought, and is endeavoured to be, there is nothing to counteract the impression made. The spectators, and particularly the players, are no longer upon their guard; that modesty and reserve so commendable in the female sex is partly laid aside, and intercourse with the other sex necessarily becomes more intimate and familiar than it should be. Thus secret attachments are imperceptibly formed, which, supposing them always confined within the bounds of innocence and propriety, are, nevertheless, the unavoidable source of many troubles. The imagination is exalted, the senses are excited, and passions or desires still unknown are then raised. Deluded by their feelings, young gentlemen and ladies foolishly imagine, that the supreme happiness in this world consists in being in love. This idea creates within a restlessness which follows them every where, diminishes by insensible degrees their relish for pious exercises, interrupts their most serious and indispensable occupations, and makes them eager to meet with an object upon which they can fix their affections; and their hearts being so predisposed, there is no doubt that the long-desired object will be soon found out. Unfortunately, as is almost always the case, inclination and exterior accomplishments are much more consulted than the experience of parents, and the rules of wisdom and pru-

dence ; and it happens too often that indissoluble engagements are indiscreetly contracted, which end in bitter disappointments, and are the cause of unavailing regrets for the remainder of life : an irreparable misfortune which parents, who are sincerely desirous to preserve the morals, and procure the happiness of their children, should be extremely careful to prevent by all the means in their power. A young lady was one day highly praised in the presence of a gentleman, for having perfectly acted her part in one of those family plays ; and being asked what he thought, he answered that he had shared the general admiration ; but, added he, “ I must tell you the truth, I shall never solicit the hand of this beautiful and clever lady. For, if she knows so well to counterfeit sentiments which certainly she did not feel ; when she would assure me of her attachment, how could I rely with full confidence upon the sincerity of her protestations ; I should always be tempted to suspect that she is acting the part of a lover in a play.”

I have been told that the foundress of the Abbey of St. Cyr allowed the young ladies who were brought up there under her inspection, to play pious dramas, and that some venerable priests assisted at the representation of *Esther* and *Athalia* (by Racine) ; yet some most respectable and learned personages did not approve of it : they said, that pious and sacred dramas would be an introduction to profane ones, which would be attended with some danger ; and indeed such was the case. After having performed the tragedies of *Esther* and *Athalia* to the admiration of the whole court, the young ladies were invited to play *Andromache*. They acted their respective parts with such feeling, that Mde. de Maintenon was alarmed, and wrote to Racine, the author, “ Nos petites filles viennent de jouer votre *Andromaque*, et l’ont si bien jouée, quelles ne la joueront de leur vie, ni aucune



de vos pieces.”—“ Our little girls have just played your Andromache, and so perfectly well, that they shall never play it again, nor *any other* of your pieces.”

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## XX.

## THE NECESSITY OF A REGULAR PLAN OF LIFE.

I know that you do not require from me to establish the great principles on which the obligation of making a profitable use of time is grounded. Thanks be to God, you have, through his divine grace, been long ago persuaded of this important truth, that we ought “ to walk with wisdom, redeeming the time.”—Col. iv. 5. When one has to deal with persons so well disposed, one may say that half of the work is done. Yet, let not the favourable opinion which I entertain of your disposition inspire you with a blind and presumptuous confidence in your own strength. The conviction of the mind, and even the best resolutions, are not always attended with a faithful practice. Alas ! the world has been from its origin filled with people perfect in theory, and very imperfect in practice. “ By their fruits you shall know them, says our Saviour.”—Matt. vii. 15. This is the only rule not subject to illusion, and it is by it we should judge ourselves.

There are different times during the period of our life ; but the principle which ought to influence and guide the whole tenour of our conduct at all times is, that all the days of our mortal existence enter into the plan arranged by the eternal wisdom to promote our salvation. That, to each moment, God himself has attached duties of which he will ask a strict account from

us; for from the first instant of our life, to the last, there is not a single one which we can employ with safety according to our caprice. The important thing for us, is, to know which is the divine will in this regard. This precious knowledge we shall obtain, not by eager and anxious inquiries, but by prayer; a pure and upright intention which seeks God in simplicity, and daily and generous combats against all the duplicities and artifices of self-love, and an unfeigned submission and deference to the judgment of those whom God has placed over us. Let us observe that we waste our time not only by doing nothing, or something wrong, but likewise by doing, at an improper time, even what we ought to do. We are strangely ingenious to deceive and seek ourselves; and what worldlings do openly and without disguise, many people, who seem to have a desire of serving God, often do in a more artful manner, and under some specious pretence which hides from their seduced eyes the deformity of their conduct.

The means to make a profitable use of time is, to habituate ourselves to live in a perpetual dependence on the Spirit of God, to be always ready to receive from his paternal hand whatever he is pleased to give us, consulting him inwardly when we are under the necessity of taking a resolution without delay; to implore his protection on those trying occasions in which virtue is, as it were, fainting away, and raise our hearts to him when, carried by sensible objects, we are imperceptibly led astray from the straight road and surprised in the forgetfulness of his divine presence. Oh! how happy is the soul, that, by a sincere self-renunciation, is without interruption in the hands of her Creator, constantly disposed to conform herself to, and accomplish his will, and at every hour of the day is addressing him within herself this prayer: "O Lord, what wilt thou have me

to do? O Lord, teach me to do thy will." Thou wilt show that thou art my God by teaching me this important truth, and I shall prove that I am thy creature by my implicit and unreserved obedience to thy commands. In what hands, O God Almighty, and infinitely merciful, could I be better and more safely placed than in thine? I am encompassed with ignorance and weakness. At a distance from thee I am always threatened with the attacks of my enemies, and my salvation is exposed to the most imminent dangers. Wert thou to leave me in the hands of my own counsel, blinded by my natural propensities and feelings, what could I choose but what would be wrong or prejudicial to me? I should make use of the precious time thou hast granted me to work out my salvation, according to my corrupt inclinations or caprice. All my actions would be under the baneful influence of self-love, and tainted with sin. In such a melancholy disposition what could I expect but to be irretrievably lost? Send down, therefore, O Lord, from above, thy divine light to support and guide my tottering and wandering steps; grant me the assistance of thy grace according to my daily wants, as food is given to children according to their age and weakness. By turning to advantage the present time, teach me to repair the past, never to rely with senseless confidence on the future, and put in practice what thou pointest out to me as conducive to my advancement in virtue.

In order to turn to our spiritual profit the time of business and exterior occupations, we need only conform ourselves to the designs of Divine Providence, clearly manifested to us by the circumstances in which we are situated. We have only to follow God's will with simplicity and willingness, submitting entirely to him our inclinations or repugnances, avoiding all useless reflections upon ourselves, banishing anxieties, over delicacy,

precipitation, sadness, vain joy, and all those feelings which are apt to arise in the heart and prepossess the mind, according as the things which we have to do or speak of are pleasant or troublesome to us. We must be careful not to let ourselves be overwhelmed by exterior occupations of what kind soever they may be. That our undertakings may be meritorious, we must begin them with a pure intention and a desire of promoting the greater glory of God, continue them without dissipation, and finish them without eagerness or impatience. The time of conversations and amusements ought not to be trifled with, as, according as it is employed, it may be profitable or dangerous both to ourselves or others. We must therefore be particularly upon our guard on such occasions; that is to say, walk with greater fidelity in the presence of God, have recourse to that vigilance so forcibly recommended by our Lord, to aspirations and elevations of the heart, and in all that which we do or say be guided by an actual as well as an habitual reference to the accomplishment of the will of God; thus keeping our soul under the calm and sweet influence and dominion of grace, which is the only principle and solid foundation of our strength and safety. All this ought to be made use of to preserve us against the subtle poison that is often insinuated in conversations and amusements, and enable us to introduce, with propriety and discretion, what may be conducive to the instruction and edification of others. The time which is not taken up by indispensable occupations, and which we may, in some degree, consider as left to our free disposal, may become as useful as it is generally agreeable to us. We cannot employ it more effectually to our comfort and improvement than by dedicating it, in an intimate commerce with God by prayer, to repair our strength, inevitably somewhat debilitated by our intercourse with the world.

Prayer is so necessary, it is the source of so many blessings, that the soul that has found out and enjoyed this precious treasure, naturally returns to it as soon as she is at liberty to follow her inclinations.

In order to be directed with wisdom in the employment of our time, and avoid two equally dangerous extremes, a careless indolence and anxious activity, a regular plan of life ought to be adopted. All writers on morality unanimously agree, that it is one of the best means to promote our advancement in virtue, preserve that inestimable liberty of mind so necessary to perform our respective duties without hurry or trouble, and keep our souls in a state of tranquillity and peace. By the preservation of order in all our actions we check inconstancy and levity. Fickle by nature is the human heart, it is fond of change, and perpetually tends to start aside from the straight line of conduct. Hence arises the propriety of bringing ourselves under subjection to method and rule, which, though at first it may prove constraining, yet, by degrees, from the experience of its happy effects, and the powerful influence of habit becomes agreeable and a second nature. Order rectifies those irregularities of temper and manners to which we give the name of caprice, and which are the distinguishing characteristics of a disordered mind. It prevents the doubts and perplexities which are inevitable, when one is always uncertain what is to be done for the next moment; and thus it is a great preservative against acting at random. In short, order is the parent of steadiness, and forms consistency of character. I exhort you, therefore, to choose a plan of life; but before you settle it in an irrevocable manner, you must have recourse to prayer, in order to obtain from God a supernatural light to guide you, repeating with the royal prophet, "O Lord, make the way known to me wherein I

should walk, for I have lifted up my soul to thee.”—Ps. cxlii. 8. Then consult your particular inclination, your strength, your health, the repose which you may stand in need of, the circumstances in which you are placed, the length of time which you can, without affection or inconvenience, pass in your room, and that which you are obliged to be in the company of your husband or your friends. Without this previous examination you might be exposed to undertake more than you could perform with ease; and hence, in spite of your good resolutions, you will not persevere. For, if we adopt a plan of conduct which will require a constant violence over ourselves, and put us under perpetual restraint, we shall find, every day, the most specious pretences to retrench some part of it, and in a very short time we shall give it up entirely. Before we begin a journey, we must, undoubtedly, examine with care which is the shortest and safest road we ought to take to reach the place to which we intend to go. But, this examination being done, we must beware not to take successively, all the roads which we meet with in our way, it would be an infallible means never to arrive; perhaps, to retrace our steps, and even to go further back than from the place from which at first we set off. Therefore, after having leisurely and carefully considered all things and made your choice, you must adhere to it let it cost you what it will.

You will have two dangerous temptations to resist, and which will require of you both discretion and courage. The first, to persist with obstinacy in following every part of the regular plan of life which you have adopted at all times and in all circumstances. The second, to be dejected and discouraged, when through human frailty you have been guilty of some omission or neglect. A scrupulous punctuality would lay you upon a perpetual

restraint, and deprive you of that liberty of mind requisite to perform our duties with propriety and cheerfulness. Dejection and discouragement would induce you to give up your best resolutions. A wise and well ordained exactitude in keeping or observing a rule of conduct, consists in never departing from it, from weariness, impatience, disgust, and even the hope of being better disposed at another time than that fixed by that rule. When we are under the impression of any of these above-mentioned feelings we must not listen to our repugnancies, but on the contrary arm ourselves with undaunted courage, and be faithful to our rule. In unforeseen circumstances you must do what you can, deviating as little as possible from the plan which you have adopted, and resuming without delay the part which you have been compelled to leave off. Those momentary and casual interruptions will be without any essential inconvenience, because they will not proceed from disgust or caprice. Nay, they will serve to curb that spirit of independence and self-love so congenial to our corrupt nature, and thus teach you to make the sacrifice of your present satisfaction, to a perfect conformity to the will of God, which is one of the chief ends of a regular plan of life. The occasions of making such sacrifices may frequently occur; yet there will be nothing arbitrary in your conduct, because your deviations from the usual rule will have been commanded by the necessity of the moment, and of course nothing which can raise doubts, and require much consideration. By that habitual exactness your inclinations will sometimes be thwarted, and may cause you to feel some bodily pains, I acknowledge. But all this will afford you daily opportunities of practising mortification, and self-denial, which will be so much the more meri-

torious that the combats and victory will be only known to God.

Habituate yourself to rise every day at ——. I cannot precisely fix the hour, as you are not quite independent. I only say that, as far as it will be in your power, it must be at a determined time, taking the rest necessary to recruit your strength, but shaking off with courage all indulgence of sloth or effeminacy. When you awake in the night, avoid carefully to recal to your remembrance the different occurrences of the day, which might tend to excite your imagination or feelings; this would drive away sleep, heat your blood, and be injurious to the health of your body and the peace of your soul. Endeavour to contract the holy habit of raising your thoughts to God as often as you awake, considering that either sleeping or waking you are always under his eyes and powerful protection. Address to him, if not by word of mouth, at least mentally this prayer of David: "What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things he hath rendered to me."—Ps. cxv. 12. "I have remembered thee on my bed, and I will meditate on thee in the morning, because thou hast been my helper."—Ps. lxii. 7. Make no effort to keep yourself awake; remain quiet and calm in the arms of God as a babe on the bosom of its mother, without any other will but to be always conformable to whatever he may ordain for you. If you say some vocal prayers, or make some pious reflections, let them be short, retrench all labour, or close and intense application of the head, putting in practice the maxim of the same royal prophet. "In peace, in the self same, I will sleep and I will rest; for thou, O Lord! singularly has settled me in hope."—Ps. iv. 9, 10.

As soon as you are awake, represent to yourself that



Almighty God addresses you with these words of the Holy Scriptures: "My daughter give me thy heart, and let thy eyes keep my ways."—Prov. xxii. ; 26. To this sweet invitation answer with the utmost fervour: O ! the best of fathers, my creator and sovereign good ; is it possible that thou shouldst vouchsafe to ask my heart ? Yes: I most willingly give it to thee without the least restriction or reserve. Poor and miserable as it is, receive it with indulgence. Let no creature ever withdraw it from thee. Mayest thou alone possess it ! Let thy divine love be always predominant in it over all human attachment. Thou knowest my extreme weakness, be thou my helper and support. My infirmities cannot be hidden from thee. I prostrate myself at thy sacred feet, and say with the leper of the Gospel: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Hear my humble prayer and "stretching thy hand touch me, saying, I will ; be thou made clean."—Matt. viii. 2. "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hidden from thee."—Ps. xxxvii. 10. Give me what thou commandest, and command what thou pleaseth. You must not look upon it as an indispensable duty to repeat literally those prayers, by no means ; you ought only to do your best to be penetrated with the sentiments which they express, without troubling yourself in what form or manner you manifest them. Let your heart be animated with gratitude and love ; it will always speak with the greatest propriety.

As soon as you are dressed (which must always be done with great modesty, either alone or in the presence of others), if it depend upon you, remain shut up in your bed-room, or retire to some other, where you may be at liberty to say your morning prayers, without fear of being unnecessarily interrupted. Never omit this pious exercise, except in case of impossibility on account of

sickness. Be persuaded that the exactitude in this point which I recommend to you, is one of the most efficacious means to draw down upon us the grace of God on all the occurrences of the day. The formula of vocal prayers which you must make use of, I leave entirely to your free choice. I only advise you not to make it too long, but to endeavour to enter into the sentiments of devotion which they intend to convey to the mind, and inspire the heart with. "When you are praying, speak not much as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard. Be not you therefore like to them; for your Father knoweth what is needful for you, before you ask him."—Math. vi. 7. Your vocal prayers, always recite slowly and with attention. Never be in a hurry to finish them. Remember that it is a thousand times more profitable to say only half of a psalm with recollection and fervour, than several with precipitation and heedlessness. If interrupted do not give way to trouble or ill humour; do with simplicity and cheerfulness what is required of you, then resume your prayer where you have left it; if, however, you are at liberty to do it without affectation or inconvenience to others. Offer yourself and all your actions to God, and let the accomplishment of his adorable will be your chief and last end. Declare to him that, with the assistance of his Divine grace, your firm resolution is to be guided and to act from the sole motive of pleasing him. Be convinced of that incontrovertible truth, that either you be tried by crosses and disappointments, or favoured with success in your undertakings and interior spiritual consolations, all is ordained or permitted for the best purposes and your greater good.

You ask me how you can offer to God your most indifferent actions, walks, visits, dress, reading books for recreation's sake, &c. &c.; and you would be glad to have

a particular prayer for each one of those things, or at least to know how to make an offering of them. That the most common actions may be offered to God, is evident from the testimony of St. Paul, "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do; do all to the glory of God."—Cor. x. 31. St. Francis of Sales compares heroic virtues, and an exact fidelity in little things to salt and sugar. "Sugar," says he, "has a more pleasant taste, but is not of a frequent use, whilst salt is made use of to season all the food necessary to preserve life." The occasion of practising heroic virtues is rare, that of being faithful in little things is frequent. With regard to the latter we must do as respecting economy in managing money affairs. If we be not on our guard we shall at length be ruined by the repetition of small expenses. Whosoever knows how to turn to profit the least thing in the administration of temporal or spiritual concerns will soon acquire great riches. We are easily deceived about little things; we consider them as innocent, and we do not think that we have a strong affection for them. But when by some accident we are deprived of their possession, we then experience by the pain which we feel, how much we loved them, and how inexcusable was the use which we have made of them. Besides, if we neglect little things, we are exposed at every moment to scandalize, not only those who habitually live with us, but even the public. People will not be persuaded that our piety is sincere, and established on solid grounds, when in the detail of our daily actions, our conduct is remiss and irregular. How could they believe that we should not hesitate to make the most generous sacrifices when they see that we lose heart and fail in the most insignificant encounters?

The most indifferent actions cease to be so when performed with the intention of conforming ourselves to the

order of providence. Let it not be imagined that fidelity and exactness in little things, is the effect of constraint or slavish fear; no, it is the happy fruit of love, which is always exempt from the anxieties and troubles of scrupulous souls. We are, as it were, irresistibly drawn to neglect nothing, at the same time that God seems to urge us on to the most rigorous punctuality, and take away our liberty, the soul feels herself at large, and enjoys in him a profound peace and the sweetest comforts. The cause of our carelessness about little things, comes from our blindness and want of reflection concerning the baneful consequences of their neglect, and our insensibility with regard to the gradual progress and stronger influence of our passions. We often say that the little thing which we keep is a mere nothing, but this mere nothing is often all for us. It is a nothing of which we are so unreasonably and excessively fond, that we do not hesitate to refuse it to God; it is a nothing which we despise in words, in order to have a specious pretence not to sacrifice it; but at the bottom it is a nothing which has laid the deepest roots in your heart, and which, if we have not the courage to retrench, will be ultimately our ruin. To despise little things is not the sign of a noble and elevated mind. This contempt shows, on the contrary that we are guided in our judgments by limited and contracted views, since we regard as little, that which may have such an important and extensive result. The more averse we are to take precautions and to be exact in the performance of little duties, the more careful ought we to oppose an insurmountable barrier to that propensity to remissness and love of independence. "He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little."—Eccl. xix. 1.

Sometimes actions which appear quite insignificant are more meritorious than some others which are more

commendable in the eyes of men. 1. Because they are not of our own choice, and thus less apt to inspire us with self-complacency. 2. Because they are plain and common, and thus we are less exposed to the temptation of vain glory. 3. Because if we do them with moderation, and purity of intention, we shall find many more opportunities of dying to ourselves, than in splendid achievements into which self-love too frequently insinuates itself. In short, because those things occur again and again, and furnish thereby secret and continual means of turning every instant of our life to advantage. It is not necessary to have a special formula of prayer for each action; to perform it well, long previous reflections, nor a close application of the mind are requisite. A simple elevation of the heart, a short aspiration is enough; and that it may be frequent and natural, it must be done in the most simple manner. With respect to walks, visits, amusements, &c. as there may be some danger of indulging too great a dissipation, to aspirations, it might be useful to add a short inward prayer, in order to beg of God the grace of not transgressing in such occasions the bounds of discretion and prudence. All that which comes within the circle of the daily occupations and conveniences of the state of life in which Divine Providence has placed us, can and ought to be offered to God. Nothing is unworthy of him but sin. When you feel that an action cannot be offered to him, conclude that it is incompatible with the duties of a Christian, at least that you should entertain some doubts on the subject, consequently suspend acting till they are removed. All spiritual writers have constantly declared that in order to pray always, it is not necessary to be always upon our knees. A continual attention to God in all things, by an invariable desire to please him; a perpetual embracing of his adorable will in all occa-

sions, even under the severest strokes of adverse fortune, is a prayer. This implies that in every action the devout soul may say, "I am engaged in domestic affairs, but my heart loves. I am enjoying a necessary recreation, and an indispensable repose, but my heart speaks to God. In this manner, without any painful effort, without that unappeasable solicitude, which is generally bestowed upon temporal concerns, every action might become a direct means of sanctifying souls, and leading them to God."—(Dr. Coombe.)

In order not to be taken unawares, and as it were quite unarmed, before you leave your room, endeavour to foresee what most likely you will have to do in the course of the day, praying earnestly "to God to guide you in the right path," (Ps. xxvi. 11.) "to turn away your eyes that may not behold vanity, and quicken you in his way."—Ps. cxviii. 27. We have a strong propensity to all the pleasures depending on the senses; and we are so powerfully invited to enjoy them by all the objects that surround us, that unless we be protected by the grace of God, our fall is inevitable. When we are animated with fervour, we are ready to say with the royal Prophet, "In my abundance I said I shall never be moved, but thou turnedst away thy face from me and I became troubled."—Ps. xxix. 7, 8. Who can therefore preserve me from utter ruin in such a slippery road? but thee alone my most merciful Redeemer? Thou hast conquered the world, and thou canst reign in me without a rival, by the influence of thy grace, and infusing into my soul comforts and delights infinitely superior to those which are so apt to seduce us. But keep constantly present to your mind, that that necessary grace cannot be obtained but through prayer. A poor man whose wants are continual, and who has neither strength nor abilities to re-

lieve them, has no other resource but to beg the assistance of those who can help him. This is our case with regard to our spiritual necessities. Are we therefore to wonder that Jesus Christ and his apostles have commanded us "always to pray and not to faint."—Luke xviii. 3. If there were no such precepts, our weakness and frailty alone should suggest to us this pious practice. But unfortunately, although our wants be so numerous and urging, we are seldom sensible of them. If our bodily strength be ever so little impaired, we feel it immediately; the least headache or oppression of the chest, quickly admonishes us that we stand in need of the physician or some remedy; but often our spiritual strength is almost entirely exhausted before we are aware of the extent, and sometimes even of the existence of the disorder. We are apt to attribute to a first impulse, and consider as an insignificant neglect, or a little weakness, what is often the effect of a predominant passion, and of an already corrupted heart. We are exposed to love the world and the things of the world with a real and violent affection, whilst we are fondly persuading ourselves that we have transient thoughts, and evanescent desires for its enjoyments. Who can discern with accuracy and certainty slight impressions from that permanent love which the world is apt to inspire with a soul daily exposed to its seducing influence? Who can assure her that it is from necessity, and with repugnance, and not willingly and from inclination, that she is "subject to vanity," as St. Paul says? What shall we do in such awful uncertainty, but to humble ourselves, and cry up to Jesus Christ, as the Apostles did when assailed by a violent storm, "Lord, save us, we perish."—Matt. viii. 25.

It seems to me that this is a proper prayer for a person obliged to live in the midst of the allurements of

the world, a thousand times more dangerous to her salvation, than the most violent tempest, and the ragings of the sea can ever be for the preservation of her life. O my God and most sweet saviour, turn away my eyes that they may not behold vanity, fix them upon thee alone who art the sovereign good, and eternal and never-fading beauty, penetrate my whole being with a deep sense of thy unspeakable perfections, but do not confine thy mercy in my regard to turn away my eyes only once, that they may not see vanity; for were I left to myself, through my unaccountable weakness and frailty, I should soon seek again with eagerness those vain, but, alas! too alluring objects which thou wert pleased to remove from me. Make me therefore walk steadily in the road of justice and truth, in that happy road where there is nothing seen or heard but truth and charity, "Quickened me in thy way," continually fill up my mind and imagination with thoughts and images which will lead me constantly to thee; penetrate my heart with that irresistible attraction which makes souls "run after the sweet odour of thy perfumes." Consecrate also my body by the infusion of thy divine spirit, and the reception of thy adorable flesh in the sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist, so that "both my heart and my flesh may rejoice in the living God." Ps. lxxxiii. 1. Grant, O Jesus, the eternal lover of souls, that become by thy grace and thy sacraments, thy temple, thy child, one of thy members, the flesh of thy flesh, the bone of thy bones, and in some degree partaker of thy divinity, I may never have other feelings, other sentiments but thine. If it be not according to the designs of thy inscrutable, but always merciful providence, that I should be exempt from temptations, preserve me from yielding to them. Be pleased to conquer in me the assaults of the devil, as thou didst when he had the impious bold-



ness and temerity to attack thee, not by hindering him to make the criminal attempt, but by rejecting and overcoming the temptation. Whenever this vile and crafty seducer will tempt me either by sensuality, curiosity, or vain glory, fortify me against all his power and stratagems, that I may be no more moved nor shaken in my resolutions, than thou wert thyself in the desert. Were he to offer to me all the honours and enjoyments of the world, assuring me that he would put me in the full possession of them, provided I should adore him, turn away my eyes that I may not behold vanity; discover to me and make me sensible of the illusion of his treacherous promises, and engrave in indelible characters in my heart, that essential and eternal truth, the sole mention of which was sufficient to drive him away from thee covered with shame. "It is written the Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve."—Matt. iv. 9.

After your morning prayer, and before you leave your room, make half of an hour or twenty minutes of meditation or mental prayer. I say before you leave your room, because then you will have your mind more free and exempt from distractions almost inseparable from the attention which you will be obliged to give to your family concerns, and consequently your heart will be better disposed to receive the impressions of the Holy Ghost. Respecting the method which you should adopt for mental prayer, and the preparation for it, I refer you to the introduction of a devout life; you will find in this excellent book the best rules, and I cannot advise you to choose any other. I shall only observe to you, that you must not make your mental prayer a laborious study, a painful task, though you ought not to give a free and unrestrained scope to all the pious thoughts which may occur to your mind during that pious exer-

cise, but to confine yourself to meditate upon a particular subject; yet as St. Francis of Sales justly remarks, you should not so strictly adhere to a method, as to be disturbed and uneasy when you cannot follow its directions. "Although commonly speaking," says he, "considerations ought to go before affections and resolutions, yet, when the Holy Ghost gives you affections before considerations, you must not seek these considerations, for this is used for no other end but to stir up affections. In a word, whensoever affections offer themselves, we must receive them, whether they come before or after all considerations, and although I have placed the affections after all the considerations I have done it only to distinguish more plainly the parts of prayer, for otherwise, it is a general rule never to restrain the affections, but always to let them have their free course when they present themselves. But as for the resolutions, they are always to be made after the affections, and at the end of the whole meditation, before the conclusion."

You cannot flatter yourself to be always exempt from distractions during the time of your mental prayer. When they are involuntary, as I have already told it you in another place, they are not sinful, and of course can do you no injury. Borne with patience and humility, they may be more conducive to your advancement in virtue, than a *sensibly* fervent prayer, in which you might be transported with pious raptures, because you might thereby be tempted to entertain sentiments of self-complacency. Carelessness in prayer is very reprehensible, of course it ought to be sedulously avoided: but the involuntary wanderings of the imagination, and of which we should be happy to be delivered, are not a proof nor a sign that the love of God is not predominant in the heart, since this love, on which solid virtue is grounded, depends on the will alone, and the will cannot be guilty

in distractions as long as it is averse to them. Thus, whilst the exterior senses of the spouse are buried in a profound sleep, her heart is awake and burning with love. A father is not lways occupied with the thoughts of a beloved son, nor his love for him *sensibly* felt, and distinctly present to his mind at all times, a thousand different objects take up his attention. But those transitory distractions, this momentary preoccupation, if they interrupt the feeling, they do not destroy the existence of paternal love. At any time the thought of his son returns to his mind; he loves him, and feels that he has not been a single instant without loving him, although he may have been for a while without thinking of him. Such is the effect of our love for our heavenly Father, if it be proceeding from the heart, and solidly grounded upon faith. The wanderings of the imagination, the casual evagations of the mind, may at times deprive us from the feeling of its influence, but it is still reigning and operating within that "hidden man of the heart," that is always acting "in the incorruptibility of a quiet and meek spirit." Our duty is to make a good use of our *free* thoughts, by turning and directing them towards the *beloved*, without giving way to disquietude about those, the importunity of which we cannot prevent, nor get rid of when we like. God, who knows much better than we do, what is advantageous to our advancement in Christian perfection, will grant us an undisturbed recollection of mind in our prayers, when we shall stand in need of this spiritual gift. In the mean while, let us remain in peace, and abandon ourselves blindfolded to the impenetrable designs of his wisdom over us in our involuntary distractions.

The death of your most estimable friend, notwithstanding all the prayers which have been offered to God for the

preservation of her life, so necessary to her young and rising family, has, I see by your letter, caused you much trouble and affliction; although you have rejected with fidelity the importune and melancholy thoughts which have occurred to your mind on the occasion; it seems that they continue to tease and harass you, and that in spite of all your endeavours to the contrary, you cannot help being now and then tormented with doubts respecting the efficacy of prayer, since, as you say, we so seldom obtain what we pray for. I shall first answer to you that these doubts being involuntary, you ought not to be alarmed at their importunity. It is not the *feeling*, says St. Francis of Sales, which makes us guilty, but the *consenting*, and therefore as there is no consenting, there is neither sin nor imperfection. Secondly, without alluding either to you or to any one of your friends, I shall say, that if the generality of men obtain so little from praying to God, it is because their prayers are very imperfect, either with regard to the favours they petition for, the motives which animate them, and the tepidity and carelessness with which they implore God's infinite goodness and mercy. Let us examine ourselves with impartiality. Can we say with confidence that all our prayers are attended with faith, humility, and perseverance? Are we penetrated with a thorough conviction that we are addressing ourselves to the Author and Sovereign giver of all good gifts, and that he has the will as well as the power to grant us all that is most conducive to our real happiness? If he require that our supplications to him should be animated with pure motives, assiduity and confidence, it is because he is zealous of our perfection, and has for us the sentiments of the most tender parent. Let us remember that we have in our power by the affections and desires of our

heart to be united to God ; but how can we expect that he will vouchsafe to enter into that intimate union with us, if we show him only coldness and indifference ?

The most ordinary causes of the inefficacy of our prayers originate from our improper dispositions, and the nature of the objects which we are solicitous to obtain, and which are refused to us, because they would eventually prove detrimental to our souls. " You ask and receive not because you ask amiss"—(James iv. 3.); and also, " because too often we know not what we should pray for as we ought."—Rom. viii. 26. When we petition for such things which God knows would be either unprofitable to us, or an obstacle to our improvement in wisdom or virtue, the more he loves us, the more firmly he rejects our prayers ; he would rather see his children weep in bitterness of soul, than to yield to their blind desires, and procure for them that which they ask for as nourishing food, and which he foresees would be changed into a deadly poison. O ! if we could penetrate through the veil which hides from our eyes the secret propensities of the human heart, how often should we say of that young man or woman, whose premature death their parents bewail with unavailing tears, that he or she " was taken away lest wickedness should alter his or her understanding, and deceit beguile his or her soul." Wisd. iv. 11.

If our prayers be attended with good dispositions, we shall always experience the help and assistance of God. The just calumniated and persecuted have recourse to him, and they feel the effect of his all-powerful protection. It is not always by the deliverance from the oppression under which they groan, or by the destruction of their enemies ; nay, sometimes it happens that, notwithstanding their long and ardent prayers, their sufferings increase. But let us remember that the relief

which God affords in this world to the just, chiefly consists in the fortitude of soul which enables them to encounter the most severe trials, and in that spiritual joy which the augmentation of divine love in their hearts inspires them with, and which often makes them wish to suffer more than they actually do. I am filled with comfort; "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation."—(2 Cor. vii. 4.) said St. Paul. St. Louis, of France, met with great misfortunes in his wars against the Mahometans; but by his courage, patience and resignation he gave to the whole world, and his very enemies the brightest example of the most heroic virtues. As for himself, he never lost the peace of his soul, and his piety was raised to the highest perfection. We cannot always give a satisfactory account of each event in particular, because the ways of divine providence are impenetrable to our limited understanding. We know besides, that temporal blessings are not promised in the Gospel to the practice of virtue; yet one may always say that the just and virtuous are under the special protection of God. "The continual prayer of a just man availeth much;" for, whatever may happen to him, he will never be exposed to temptations beyond his strength, nor dangers from which he cannot come out with safety, and calamities which he cannot bear with equanimity and patience. "Prayer," says St. Bernard, "is scarcely upon our lips, that it is already written down in the book of life." God always looks down upon us with an eye of compassion and paternal indulgence, and receives our supplications with benevolence and goodness. When we pray, we have therefore the fullest assurance of obtaining one of these two things, viz., that he will grant us what we ask for, or what is much more advantageous, although we do not ask for it. Thus our prayers are never fruitless; for when through ignorance

we pray for useless or dangerous things, in place of them, he favours us with what we should most ardently beg of his goodness, were we to be well acquainted with our real wants.

Besides the morning meditation or mental prayer, I recommend to you to dedicate before your dinner, half of an hour to pious reading. This you can do without any one taking notice of it. Employ for your improvement in virtue, and to adorn your soul, a part of the time which worldly ladies waste, to gratify their vanity and fondness for dress, and you will always find sufficient leisure for this pious and so useful a practice. In case of real impossibility, you will make it up by short and frequent aspirations, as you have been advised to do in the morning. Thus your union with God will continue uninterrupted. Never postpone from repugnance or some vain pretext, that exercise of piety to another time. Be punctual, and do your best to dispose your mind and heart for it, by driving away from your remembrance all temporal concerns, and exciting yourself to devotion. "Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God."—Eccl. xviii. 23. This preparation chiefly consists in putting ourselves in the presence of God, reflecting that it is with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sovereign Judge, that we are to converse with, in order to pay him the worship and adoration due to him, and lay at his sacred feet the eternal interests of our soul. Considering his awful majesty, almighty power and infinite perfections, is it not right, is it not absolutely indispensable to use all our endeavours to be recollected, attentive, and penetrated with the most lively sentiments of humility, gratitude, confidence and love? Is it not evident that a wilful and deliberate neglect of such precautions requisite to keep under subjection, and in a state of peace,

all our mental faculties in order to listen to God, and receive the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, cannot be excusable? When at the end of your pious reading or meditation, you have a deep sense of your nothingness and miseries. When you feel yourself animated with a greater confidence in God, a more ardent zeal for the correction of your defects, and sincere charity, and unfeigned forbearance respecting your neighbour, although you could not give a distinct account, nor yourself clearly know how you have passed that time of meditation or reading, be assured that it has been profitably employed.

In your night prayer, examine your conscience, recalling to your remembrance in a short manner, the various occurrences of the day which is just finished. Enter into an exact reckoning with yourself, ask humbly Almighty God's pardon for all the faults and imperfections, which you will then discover to have been guilty of, and take a firm resolution of carefully avoiding them for the future. Your fidelity to make that daily examination will entertain your vigilance, prevent frequent relapses, enable you to repair small losses, and discharge in some degree the debts which we contract every day towards the divine justice. Moreover by keeping you continually alive to a sense of your extreme weakness, and of the necessity of divine grace to work out your salvation; this pious practice will be a very powerful means to support you, and accelerate your progress in the virtues of your state of life. In going to bed, make the sign of the cross, saying, at least inwardly, "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commit my soul. O may I always fall asleep and awake in thy love!"



## XXI.

## ASSISTANCE TO THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

Our Saviour Jesus 'Christ, true God and true man, who "coming forth from the Father, came into the world," (John xvi. 28.) gave himself a redemption for all men, has been pleased to continue to reside with them upon earth, in order to fulfil there the functions of his divine priesthood, even after he had left the world to go to the Father, and through his almighty power "had ascended above all the heavens, from which he had descended for our salvation"—Eph. iv. 10. It is in the sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist, that he continues to execute those unspeakable designs of his love in our regard. The *sensible* presence of Jesus Christ upon earth, and the visible exercise of his ministry lasted only from the day of his nativity according to the flesh, to the day of his glorious ascension. But his presence, although not perceivable by our senses, and his invisible actions are perpetuated among us, and will last to the consummation of the world. Under the mysterious veils with which he clothes himself in the Blessed Eucharist, he is really present, as, when after his Resurrection, he appeared to his disciples, spoke to them, showed them his sacred wounds, ate with them, and when taking leave of them he blessed them, saying, "All power is given me in heaven and earth; go, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days to the consummation of the world"—Matt. xvi. 19, 20. Im-

pelled by his ardent charity for us, he resides in our tabernacles. At the voice of his ministers, Jesus immolates himself for us, a victim of propitiation; daily he reproduces his sacred body and spills his precious blood, and dies a mystical death. In every country of the world, and one may say with truth, at every hour of the day, in the holy sacrifice of the mass, our Lord Jesus Christ offers himself through the ministry of the priest in an unbloody manner, as he offered himself and was immolated on the cross in a bloody manner. In our temples as on Mount Calvary, it is the same priest, the same victim, Jesus Christ. The only difference consists in the manner in which the victim is offered and immolated. In this adorable sacrament, this most merciful Saviour daily accomplishes the promise which he had made to his apostles, "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you."—John xiv. 18.

This is the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and it is the conviction of its truth which in all ages has made all pious souls consider the assistance at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, independently of any ecclesiastical precept, as one of our most indispensable duties, and not only on Sundays and holy days of obligation, but even on week days, when they could do it without a real detriment or inconvenience. To be faithful to this devotion, I must earnestly exhort you, because that sacred rite is the most essential act of religion, and from which we can derive the most precious spiritual benefits. Alas! those who upon light and sometimes trivial pretences dispense themselves from assisting at mass, must indeed have but very imperfect and superficial notions of the catholic doctrine, and never well understood the characteristics of true and solid piety. If they represented to themselves, that when the holy sacrifice of the mass is offered, the eternal, word, the only son of God

descends on our altars, that the holy inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem, veil their face, not being able to support the bright splendour of the divinity there present, and sing with ecstatic transports "glory to God in the highest, and glory to the spotless lamb." If we reflected for ever so little, that to supply the inefficacy and unworthiness of our offerings and adorations, Jesus Christ God-man offers himself by our hands, that the homage which he pays to his heavenly Father may be truly our own act, homage and adoration, and by this unspeakable union become meritorious for us and acceptable to him. What would our feelings be?

In the holy sacrifice of the Mass, it is no longer a weak and mortal creature that adores the creator and preserver of its being. It is a God-man who adores the eternal God, it is the invisible head of the Church who united with his members in the most intimate manner, and far beyond that which our limited intellect can ever comprehend, adores him with them. It is he "who alone is worthy to receive power and divinity, and wisdom and strength, and honour and glory, and benediction for ever and ever," (Apoc. v. 12.) who by a stupendous and constantly renewed miracle of his love, vouchsafes to offer and immolate himself for men and with them, and thus enables them to use the words of the royal prophet, and say with propriety and to the great benefit of their souls, "Thy kingdom is of all ages, thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and holy in all his works"—Ps. cxlv. v. 13. In short, if we thought that by the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the infinite merits of our crucified Redeemer, are applied to our souls, and consequently that by our neglecting to assist at it, we deprive ourselves of the most efficacious means to heal

our spiritual wounds, we should not certainly be guilty of such a neglect.

In the holy sacrifice of the Mass, Jesus Christ immolates himself every day on our altars, not only to offer to the supreme being, the sovereign Lord of all things, an homage worthy of his infinite majesty; he is, besides, occupied with the reconciliation of sinners, and the wants of all men. We are authorised to say at the foot of the altar, what we could have said at the foot of the cross. "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."—John ii. 1, 2. Thus when we assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass with a lively faith, firm hope, ardent charity, filial fear, sincere humility, profound respect, heartfelt contrition, and an unequivocal purpose of amendment, "we shall obtain mercy, and find grace in a seasonable aid."—Heb. iv. 16. "In effect," says the Council of Trent, "Almighty God being appeased by the oblation of this sacrifice, and granting to those that are present, and animated with proper dispositions, the gift of a penitential spirit, forgives sins, and even heinous crimes."\* O! my sweet and most merciful Lord, thou knowest the number of souls which thou hast thereby reclaimed from their wicked ways! How many unnatural children, who had almost entirely renounced and forsaken thee, by the irregularity and profligacy of their conduct, hast thou not, by the influence of thy grace changed into sincere penitents, crying with bitter sorrow, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to

\* "Hujus quippe oblatione pacatus Dominus, gratiam addonum penitentiae concedens, crimina et peccata etiam ingentia dimittit."—Conc. Trid. Sess. xxii. c. 2.

be called thy son, make me as one of they hired servants." Luke xv. 19. How many criminals have returned from this new Mount Calvary striking their breast, and imploring mercy! How many lepers, after having earnestly solicited thy assistance, have been inwardly urged to go and show themselves to the priests, and have been cured of their loathsome disorder!

When the ministers of the church exhort and press worldlings to leave their crooked ways and sinful life, they allege as an excuse, the danger of the occasions, the violence of the attacks, the ungovernableness of their passions, the irresistible influence of long habits; they will acknowledge even that they are wrong, but they will add that they cannot help it, and that in spite of their best endeavours they are carried away by a torrent which it is out of their power to stem. But why are they so weak and helpless? Because they neglect to have recourse to the assistance and support which they have near at hand. If they be still sinking under the weight of their chains, it is because they do not apply to the powerful hand that could relieve them. Let them come and prostrate themselves at the feet of our Redeemer, present on our altars; let them express to him an earnest desire of recovering his favours; let them pray to him and implore his protection, saying: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on us." There is no doubt that he will hear their humble supplications, that the hardness of their heart will be softened, the violence of their passions assuaged, their fetters broken, and the efficacious means which in his infinite mercy he had kept in reserve, will be granted to them through the medium of this adorable sacrifice, and that at length they will be reconciled to their offended God, and recover that liberty, peace, joy, and spiritual life, which they had lost by indulging their corrupt inclinations. Yet, you must not

believe that the sacrifice of the mass is, properly speaking, the ordinary means of which God makes use of to operate our justification. No: this adorable sacrifice does not immediately justify the sinner, as baptism and the sacramental absolution, but it obtains the gift of repentance, through which he is disposed to apply to the sacrament of penance, and by its reception in proper and holy dispositions to impetrate the forgiveness of all his transgressions.

It would be a very wrong interpretation of the doctrine of the Holy Council of Trent to pretend, that in order to recover sanctifying grace, when we have had the misfortune of losing it by mortal sins, it is sufficient to assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. The benefit we derive from our assistance at it, when we hear it with faith and other necessary conditions, is the remission of venial sins, without the obligation of applying to the sacrament of penance, and several other spiritual graces. As for mortal sins they can only be remitted by the sacrament, of penance. Always remember that the sole effect with regard to such sins, of our assistance at mass, is to appease the wrath of God, and induce him to grant us the requisite dispositions to receive with fruit the sacrament of the reconciliation, which alone it cannot be too strongly inculcated, can operate our justification. And it is thus understood and explained, that we say the sacrifice of the Mass is *propitiatory* for the living.

“ Before our altars we perform the most meritorious, the most noble of our duties. The exercise which gives the greatest dignity to our nature, and brings us to the nearest resemblance with the Deity, is that of benevolence to our fellow-creatures, and in offering up this spotless victim, we promote the interests of all our brethren in the most effectual manner. Here we plead their cause before the throne of God. Without the aid

of this sacrifice, we should have every reason to fear, lest our manifold crimes should impede the effects of our prayers. United to Jesus in this mystery, we can pray without apprehension, knowing that he in whom the Lord is well pleased, makes continual intercession for us. Were it not for the merits of Jesus, which are here applied to the souls of men, we might indeed dread, lest the iniquities of those for whom our hearts are interested, should turn from them the current of heavenly graces ; but here the High Priest of our souls secures success to our prayers. His blood, which pleaded for the salvation of those by whom it was spilled, can likewise obtain salvation for those by whom it has been profaned.”—Archer’s Sermons.

It is not only for the sins and other necessities of the faithful living that this adorable sacrifice is offered. According to a tradition which can be traced up to the apostolic times, it is likewise offered for the dead that are departed from this world, not entirely purified from every stain of sin. The merits of the Redeemer are applied to the souls of the faithful who die in his love, but still amenable to his justice for the imperfections which they had not corrected, and the whole debt which they had not fully discharged at the moment of their death. Let us, therefore, do for those who are gone before us, what we wish should be done one day in our regard. Every time we assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, let us remember our relatives, friends, and benefactors. If they still be in a state of sufferings, it is perhaps on our account, and because their love for us was carried to excess. Now they most earnestly solicit real proofs of our friendship, and concern for their happiness. From the purifying flames in which they are detained, they cry up to us, “ Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends, because the hand of the Lord has touched

me."—Job xix. 22. Let us hasten to procure them relief, since, through his infinite goodness, God has given us the means of fulfilling this office of charity and gratitude. As often as we are present at the celebration of the awful and tremendous mysteries, let us most ardently beg of the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation, to shorten the time of their expiation, to cancel all their debts, blotting out the handwriting of the decree that is against them, fastening it to the cross of Jesus, and forgiving all their sins, admit them into his heavenly kingdom. Let us desire the ministers of the church to multiply in their behalf the sacred and salutary offerings. Thus we shall help them to become citizens of heaven, and in return of our charitable prayers, they will become our intercessors and protectors with God.

The sacrifice of the Mass is also eucharistic. That is to say, it is offered to thank God for his manifold favours. A God who never ceases for a moment to shower down on his creatures the most abundant blessings, has an incontrovertible right to their perpetual thanksgivings. Thoroughly convinced of this truth, and their utter incapacity to express their sentiments in a manner adequate to the homage of gratitude and adoration due to the Creator and supreme Ruler of the universe, I see all the saints who were most particularly favoured with the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, calling to their assistance all created beings to make up in some degree for the insufficiency and unworthiness of their thanksgivings. Hence Daniel in his admirable canticle, said: "All the works of the Lord bless the Lord, O all ye powers of the Lord. O all ye spirits of God. O ye sons of men. O ye stars of heaven. All ye seasons of the year. O ye light and darkness. O ye lightnings and clouds. O ye whales, and all that move in the waters. O all ye fowls of the air.



O all ye beasts and cattle, praise and exalt him above all for ever ! Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good, because his mercy endureth for ever and ever." Richer than if we had at our disposal all the elements, and all the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem : we have in the sacrifice of the Mass, an offering which infinitely surpasses them all in dignity and power. On our altars the eternal Son of God repeats in our name as well as in his own, what he said in the days of his mortal existence ; "O God ! I give thee thanks." What an abundant and inestimable resource in our extreme indigence ! It is an inexhaustible source from which we are allowed to draw every day thanksgivings, always acceptable to God. Thy infinite goodness in our regard, O Lord, we can never sufficiently acknowledge ; our prayers, supplications, homages, and adorations, are not worthy to be presented to thee ; but in the sacrifice of the Mass, we offer to thee thy divine Son, then the expression of our gratitude and thanksgivings is no longer that of a weak and imperfect being, it is that of a God, it is therefore equal to thy immense and ineffable blessings.

The most favourable time to negotiate successfully with the sovereign Giver of all good gifts, and to lay before him all our wishes, wants, and those of our friends, is during the holy sacrifice of the Mass. "Jesus Christ the Just, who is our Advocate with the Father, in the days of his flesh, with a strong cry and tears offering prayers and supplications . . . was heard for his reverence."—Heb. v. 7. Can we then entertain the least doubt that now, that this adorable Saviour, who is both our victim and pontiff, is risen again from the dead, sitteth at the right hand of the Father, renewing on our altars in an unbloody manner, the very same sacrifice which he offered upon the cross by the effusion of all his blood,

will intercede most powerfully for us, and "with him will give us all things."—Rom. viii. 34.

Let us approach Jesus Christ with confidence in the sacrament of his love; let us not remain in poverty, when it is so easy for us to acquire the most precious riches. Could I be heard I should say, Come ye who in punishment of the sin of our first parents are compelled to eat your bread at the sweat of your brow, offer the victim of our salvation, in order to obtain from the Lord, that he may be pleased to bless your labours, fertilize your fields, and preserve your crops. Come ye, who, by the death of a father, husband, and protector, or from some reverse of fortune are reduced to the utmost misery; come, cast yourself into the paternal arms of this God Saviour, "who, in order to be in all things like unto his brethren, has suffered and been tempted," and passed through the most severe trials. From our tabernacles where he resides, he loudly declares that he is the defender of the widow, the father of the orphan, the help of the destitute, the support of the weak, the secure asylum of all the unfortunate. Come ye afflicted mothers who are trembling either for the life or the salvation of a beloved child; come, your tears are not blameable. But will you dry them up or at least sweeten their bitterness, pour them out at the feet of Jesus; remember that he was moved to tenderness and compassion by the tears of the widow of Nain, and that he restored her son to life. He who invites you to come to him is able to afford you relief and comfort, because his power is infinite. He is most willing to do it, since his goodness and mercy are without bounds, and that it is him who addresses you with these sweet words: "Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you."—Matt. xi. 28. But bring to the sanctuary the

resignation and conformity to the will of God, of which he gave us so bright an example in the Garden of Olives ; saying, "Father, if thou wilt, remove this chalice from me : but yet, not yet my will, but thine be done."—Luke xxii. 40. If he grant your petitions, bless him ; if he appear deaf to your supplications, submit to his inscrutable designs over you ; he knows better than you, your true interests. It is often his goodness and love that dictate his refusal, and that apparent abandonment and dereliction in which you are left, and which, too often, is the occasion of impatience and murmurings. Could you penetrate the secrets of his providence, you would confess that they deserve from you the most lively sentiments of gratitude. Above all things never forget this precept, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice."—Matt. v. 33. Therefore in preference to all temporal blessings, ask the graces necessary to make you work out your salvation : ask an increase of faith, hope, and charity ; an inviolable fidelity in the accomplishment of all his commandments, courage to resist temptations, patience in adversity, humility in prosperity, and that steady and unwearied perseverance in your good resolutions and in the practice of virtue, which alone can secure to you an unfading crown. This done, you may pray for the things of this world, which ought to be always confined within the bounds marked out by the wise man : "Give me neither beggary nor riches : give me only the necessities of life."—Prov. xxx. 8. Thus you will never come out from our churches and hearing Mass, without feeling yourself animated with a supernatural strength, proof against the dangers of a prosperous or adverse fortune. Such are the important considerations which should compel every Christian sincerely desirous of his salvation to assist, as frequently as possible, at the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Let your exterior modesty, and your recollection show the pious dispositions and sentiments with which you are animated. I shall not mention here that you ought to repel all distracting thoughts, and that you should be careful not to let your eyes wander about the objects which surround you, nor allow yourself to hold any conversation nor whisperings during the celebration of the holy mysteries. "Reverence my sanctuary, I am the Lord."—Lev. xxvi. 2. "For my house shall be called the house of prayer."—Matt. xxi. 13. But I shall not insist upon the subject, your piety is so well known to me that your conduct in church will always be very edifying I have not the least doubt.

Protestants not thinking themselves strictly obliged to attend every Sunday, places of religious worship, when they find it inconvenient, easily dispense themselves from that duty, and fondly imagine that they fulfill the precept of keeping holy the Lord's day, provided they abstain from servile work, and occupy themselves at home in reading some chapter of the Bible, or some pious book. The Catholic Church requires more from her children: she most positively commands them to assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, on all Sundays, and holy days of obligation. An absolute impossibility, or a real and well-grounded inconvenience, can alone excuse them from observing this ordinance of the Church. But one ought not to believe that the obedience to that ecclesiastical law is sufficiently complied with, by hearing habitually a *low* Mass only, and that the remainder of the day may be employed according to each one's liking or caprice. No, certainly: half an hour in the whole day dedicated to an exercise of piety, though it may have been performed with great fervour cannot be considered as sanctifying the Lord's day. Hence all sincere Catholics look upon it as a duty

to assist in the afternoon as well as in the morning at the whole office of their respective churches. And when from unavoidable impediments they have been prevented from doing it, they think that they are obliged to make it up at home by spiritual readings and meditations.

Although you have a domestic chapel, this convenience does not dispense you from going to the church of the congregation to which you belong ; the edification which you ought to give to your Catholic neighbours and tenants requires it. The place of religious worship to which all your Catholic brethren resort, ought to be particularly dear to you, and you should never absent yourself from it without solid reasons. You ought to consider it as "the place which God has chosen for himself for a house of sacrifice, and where his eyes shall be opened, and his ears attentive to the prayer of him that shall pray in this place."—2 Chron. vii. 12, 15. Moreover, the most precious advantages are derived from praying to God in the assembly of the faithful, our personal petitions and supplications have greater power with him, when united to those of our Christian brethren ; for, "where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there Jesus Christ is in the midst of them."—Matt. xviii. 20. There is also a particular grace attached by God to the instructions given by the pastor to his flock. His discourses may be not remarkable for the elegance of the composition, the correctness of the style, the gracefulness of the delivery ; but pronounced in a sacred place, in the time appointed by the Church, preceded and followed by the pomp of the ceremonies, and addressed to those whom Almighty God has committed to his care, they insinuate themselves sweetly into the hearts of his hearers, and under their artlessness and simplicity, leave in them a more

salutary and lasting impression than the most adorned and pathetic eloquence could ever do.

Independently from your will, you may be deprived of the comfort of hearing mass on a Sunday, either on account of being on a journey, or being at too great distance from a Catholic church or chapel. In such a case you should, in the course of the morning, retire to your room, nearly at the time which you know is the hour when the morning office is celebrated in the chapel of the congregation near the place of your actual residence, and after having implored the grace of God to perform with recollection and fervour, the duty of religion you are going to begin, kneel before your crucifix, and with all the sentiments of devotion you are capable of, unite yourself heart and soul to the holy sacrifice that is then offered, and in this intention read the same prayers which you would have said, had you been actually present in the church. In the afternoon do the same, and shut up in a place where you will not be exposed to distractions or interruptions, recite vespers and complines, and make a pious lecture or meditation longer than on week days. If it could be done, it would be a very useful practice, to gather together your Catholic servants, and to perform with them this pious exercise. I particularly exhort you to read to them some familiar instructions adapted to their capacity on the duties of a Christian. I advise you also, especially for their sake, not to invite to dinner large parties on Sundays, that they may have time to go to church, and occupy themselves piously at home. I need not tell you never to allow them to do any servile work: I am not afraid that this precept of the divine and ecclesiastical law will be infringed in your house.

I shall not enjoin you any particular formula of pray-

ers to hear mass. The methods which are to be met with in every book of devotion, are equally good, and can equally be used with perfect safety. You are therefore at full liberty to choose that which is more congenial to your feelings, and which you have found by experience best calculated to restrain the wanderings of the imagination, fix the attention, and animate you with those sentiments of faith, humility, love, compunction which are due to the infinite majesty, spotless sanctity, and awful perfections of the adorable victim offered in sacrifice. I wish you only to conform yourself to the intentions of the Church, so that you may enter into the spirit of the solemnity of each day. For in all her festivals she recalls to our minds, either some of the sacred mysteries of our holy religion, or makes a commemoration of some particular saints, in order to excite us to have recourse to their prayers, and encourage us to the practice of virtue by the influence of their example, and by the prospect of being one day, by walking in their footsteps, partakers of their happiness and glory. Prayers which have been introduced and sanctioned by the infallible authority of the Church, and are repeated at the same time in all the different parts of the catholic world by all her ministers, are surely entitled to the highest respect; it seems to me that they draw from their universality and uniformity, a special efficacy to obtain a propitious hearing from the sovereign Lord of all things, through the all-powerful mediation of our blessed Redeemer, the intercession of the saints, and the joint prayers of the faithful. But in this as in all other acts of religion, when the manner in which we ought to perform them is not positively marked by the Church, we may apply the maxim of St. Paul, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."—2. Cor. iii. 17.

Observe with exactness and fidelity the fastings and days of abstinence, prescribed by the laws of the Catholic Church. The state of your health, or a real impossibility, are the only legitimate causes of a dispensation, for which you must apply to your confessor, after having consulted with simplicity your ordinary physician. The Gospel strongly recommends the disengagement of the heart respecting the pleasures of this life, excepting those pure and innocent amusements which are derived from religion, and the accomplishment of our duties. St. Paul speaking of himself says, "I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection." Fasting was approved by Jesus Christ, and frequently put in practice by his disciples; and all the monuments of the primitive church bear an evident testimony to the mortified life of the first Christians. A spirit of mortification is therefore one of the characteristics of solid piety. But if we embrace arbitrarily mortifications, their extent and duration will also be arbitrary; which, for a timorous soul, will open a wide door to scrupulosity, from the fear of having done too little or too much. Were you to attempt to make particular mortifications of your own accord, there might be some danger of indiscretion. Austerities are often no more exempt from illusion, than other practices of piety; in proportion as the flesh is mortified, the spirit is sometimes more alive, and apt to indulge self-complacency and pride. A sign that a soul in the midst of her austerities is still full of herself, is her obstinacy in practising them, and her ill-humour when compelled from necessity to give them up. The mortification of the flesh does not always produce the death of self-will; and if the first is not the result of the second, there is a great probability, not to say a certainty of illusion. A person sincerely mortified and dead to herself, would be ready to continue or



abandon her mortifications according to the advice of her director. Otherwise her eagerness after austerities, cannot be considered as the fruit of that unreserved self-denial and abnegation of self-will which is always the unequivocal proof of the influence of the Holy Ghost. Besides, to the corporal mortifications, such as abstinence and fasting, enjoined to all Catholics by the Church, I cannot take upon me to advise you to add any supererogatory ones, because the things which are harmless and even useful at one time, may be dangerous and hurtful at another. Therefore that must be left to your particular attraction, the circumstances you are in, the state of your health, your actual spiritual wants, and *in all cases*, the prudence, discretion, and positive decision of your director, whom you ought to consult with the utmost simplicity before you undertake any thing with regard to that subject. I shall content myself to say that you should never make any mortifications which would be prejudicial to your health, or interfere with your domestic and social duties. To choose always and in all things what is more mortifying, would be a great imprudence. By strictly adhering to such a rule, pious people would soon destroy their health, ruin their affairs, expose their reputation, put an obstacle to the necessary relations which religion as well as reason commands them to entertain with their relatives and friends, and even prevent them from doing the good works which Divine Providence might commit to their care. Moreover, if some mortifications were allowed to you, I shall recommend to you as an invariable rule to keep them quite secret, according to the precept of our Lord, "When thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee."—Matt. vi. 16, 17.

Without doing any thing extraordinary or injurious to your health, you will meet every day with many occasions of practising the most meritorious mortifications. Never to exceed at your meals the rules of the strictest temperance ; to deprive yourself unperceived of some dishes which you like best, and which can have no better effect than to gratify sensuality ; not allow yourself in your dress any thing bordering upon vanity ; to give up an attractive reading or amusing occupation when your clock admonishes you to retire to your room for your usual meditation ; to rise at the appointed time, notwithstanding the invitations of nature to remain longer in bed ; to bear, without complaint and impatience, the carelessness or inattention of a servant, the ill-humour or contradictions of a husband, the teasing noise of children, the importunity and tediousness of disagreeable visits ; a constant evenness of temper in disappointments ; an unreserved and cheerful resignation to the will of God under crosses or in maladies. In all this, there is nothing to be proud of, nothing striking, nothing apparently austere and mortified ; yet in practice it is a daily self-denial, more difficult to endure and which requires more courage to persevere in, than fasting now and then upon bread and water, long watchings, or remaining several hours together in reciting psalms, &c. &c. ; because the occasions of practising these little mortifications are almost always unforeseen, occur every day, and compel us to struggle at every moment against our pride, vivacity, love of independence, and natural inclinations ; in short, compel us to break and renounce self-will in all things. If we wish to be faithful, nature has no time to breathe, it must die to all it likes. We should prefer to make more painful sacrifices, on condition of enjoying a perfect liberty in the ordinary occurrences of life. Reflect that God con-

siders less our actions, than their motives and the submission of our will. Men appreciate and value what we do, by what appears outwardly; but God reckons as a mere nothing what often is most striking in the eyes of men, and excites their admiration. What he requires is a pure intention, a sincere and constant disposition to do or to submit to every thing which he may be pleased to ordain or permit, and a perfect disengagement of ourselves; all this may be done more frequently with less danger, and in a manner more crucifying to self-love, in common than in rare and extraordinary things. For experience teaches that we are sometimes more easily induced to make *once* a great sacrifice, than *daily* to renounce mere trifles; and that we would rather distribute a large sum of money in alms, than give up an amusement.

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## XXII.

## CONFESSION.

Have recourse to the sacrament of penance every fortnight, or at least once a month; you will derive from this practice the greatest benefits, either to recover the grace of God, had you been so unfortunate as to lose it by some grievous sin, or to repair the spiritual losses which you may have experienced since your last confession, and be renewed and fortified in your good resolutions, and guarded against the manifold dangers to which we are exposed more or less during our mortal pilgrimage. On the day you intend to go to confession, employ a part of the time which you dedicate usually to mental prayer, to examine yourself in the presence of God, beseeching him to grant you a hearty

sorrow for your sins and a firm purpose of amendment. To this preparation, add another which is very useful, *viz.*, to watch over yourself more attentively than usual, two or three days before your confession, practising secretly some little mortification, and doing some peculiar good work, in order to obtain the sincere contrition which you solicit from his boundless mercy. When during the week it seems to you, after a due examination, that you have been guilty only of some venial faults or sins of mere human frailty, perhaps, unless you wish to perform your devotions, it would be better to postpone your confession, lest by too frequent a recurrence it would become a sort of habit, and thus you might be exposed not to apply to it with the necessary dispositions to ensure its efficacy. But your more or less frequent use of the sacrament of penance must be regulated by the profit which you draw from it, and the decision of your spiritual guide.

Examine your conscience on the commandments of God and of his church, on your duties as a wife, a mother, a mistress, your social relations with others, and the temporal concerns with which you may have been occupied, begging of our Lord "to enlighten your darkness."—Ps. xvii. 29. There are pious people who examine themselves with a scrupulous anxiety, thinking that they will reap no benefit by confession, unless they remember and declare every thing, how unimportant soever it may be, which is certainly an exaggerated notion of the integrity of confession; for, notwithstanding the severity of our examination, many of our feelings will still remain undiscovered. "From my unknown sins cleanse me, O Lord," says the royal prophet, Ps. xviii. 13. But, supposing that we should know all our faults and imperfections, that knowledge would not be sufficient to obtain their forgiveness, as to know all the

wounds which we have received is not the being healed of them, and as the knowledge of our losses does not enrich us. In your examination, therefore, be not over nice or scrupulous. Undoubtedly it ought to be made with the utmost attention and care, but without anxiety or trouble; judge yourself as you would judge another person, quite a stranger to you, without human respect or criminal indulgence, but with impartiality, calmness, and moderation. Accuse yourself with the greatest simplicity of the sins which you are conscious to have been guilty of since your last confession; of the things doubtful as doubtful, and of the things of which you are certain, as certain. For, if it is a grievous fault which would render the absolution invalid to palliate our sins from a false shame, it is equally wrong to exaggerate them, either from erroneous notions of humility or an excessive fear of lessening our guilt. Be persuaded that there is no true humility without a strict adherence to truth. Such as you are in your own eyes and judgment, such ought you to represent yourself to your confessor. When you enter the sacred tribunal, imagine that he addresses you with the words of the prophet Ahias to the wife of king Jeroboam, "Do not feign thyself to be another."—Kings xiv. 6. Forget that it is to a man who can only know you from your testimony and declaration that you are going to open your soul, but to him who is the Searcher of all hearts and reins, and who is, better than yourself, acquainted with the intricacies of your conscience, your predominant passions, your actual dispositions, and the secret motives and main springs of your sentiments and actions.

When the declaration of your sins has been candid and unreserved, be assured that God will never impute to you, as a criminal disguise, what, through human weakness, or an involuntary and excusable want of

memory, you may have forgotten or not very exactly confessed. The previous and attentive care which you had taken in the examination of your conscience, the sincere and earnest desire which you had to make the state of your soul well known, and to speak the plain, the whole truth, ought to dispel your fears on the subject. Notwithstanding the most severe scrutiny of our conscience, it is not rare to forget some real fault which we have committed. Sometimes, even when we are in the tribunal of penance, we omit, through distraction, to declare some sins which were clearly present to our minds during our examination, and which we intended to accuse ourselves of. However, those sins thus involuntarily forgotten, are virtually included in the confession which has been made after a careful examination, and forgiven when the absolution is received with the previous dispositions indispensable to our reconciliation with our offended God. "Il arrive souvent que quel que soin qu'on apporte à examiner sa conscience, on ne découvre pas tous les péchés mortels qu'on a commis ; quelque fois même quand on se confesse, ou oublie de s'accuser de quelques uns qui étoient venus dans la mémoire en faisant son examen. Cependant les uns et les autres sont renfermés dans la confession qu'on a faite, et l'on en *obtient le pardon* quand on reçoit le sacrement de la pénitence avec toutes les dispositions nécessaires. Le Concile de Trente y est formel."—Conf. d'Angers. With regard to the real state of your conscience in the sight of God, and the sincerity of your dispositions when you approach the sacraments, you must not look for a *full certainty*, which is not to be enjoyed in this life ; but you may hope, with an humble confidence, that our divine Saviour in his infinite mercy will supply by the application of his merits all that may still be deficient in you.

The considerable time which you have employed to examine your conscience before your general confession, the sincere desire which you had to make yourself perfectly known to the minister of God; the candour with which you have declared all your faults, and answered his questions, the lively sentiments of contrition which penetrated your heart, ought to banish all anxious fears from your mind, and are signs that, at that important circumstance, God was pleased to forgive you all your sins and restore you to his friendship. Do not, therefore, allow yourself to examine your conscience over and over again, it would be yielding to a temptation, and fill up your soul with perplexities and useless troubles. Endeavour to persevere in your good resolutions and increase every day with fervour in the service of God, this is the best proof of a solid conversion, and the only one on which we can safely rely. "Every good tree," says our Lord, "bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit: wherefore, by their fruits you shall know them."—Matt. vii. 17—19. The integrity of a general confession does not consist in a *material* exactness, but only in the unreserved and unpalliated declaration of all the sins which we were conscious to have committed when we made it. I said of *all the sins*, because venial sins are a sufficient, though not a necessary, part of confession.

If after your general confession you discover, now and then, blemishes in your soul, which you had not as yet perceived; if you feel secret emotions or propensities to which you did not think yourself subject, do not torment yourself as if you had been guilty of a wilful and criminal omission: by no means. The knowledge which we acquire of a weakness from which we had flattered ourselves to be exempt, is only a sign that the light of the Holy Ghost is more abundantly diffused into

our soul. When he enlightens our mind, we can scarcely recover from astonishment at our former blindness ; we are struck with horror at the sight and feeling of shameful inclinations, which like venomous reptiles, had been lurking hidden in the most secret recesses of our heart, and come out of it all on a sudden. But be not surprised nor discouraged ; you are not more guilty than you were before : on the contrary, you are a great deal less. When our spiritual diseases are gradually declining, the heavenly light which, at first, had discovered them to us, is increasing in the same proportion, and shows them to us in their full deformity. This is the cause of our fears. But observe for your consolation, that generally speaking, we are only sensible of the danger of an illness when its cure is already begun. When a sick man feels nothing, he is considered as being almost past recovery ; when pain returns, it is a sign of reviving life. However, supposing that you remember some grievous faults which you are assured to have omitted to declare in your former confessions ; the only thing which you have to do, is to confess them the first time you go to the tribunal of penance. After having satisfied this duty with simplicity and according to the light of the moment, remain in peace. Cast yourself blindfolded into the bottomless abyss of God's unspeakable mercy ; put all your reliance in the infinite merits of our Saviour ; they are become yours by the reception of the sacrament of penance ; The superabundance of his atonement will make up for the insufficiency of yours ; he will purify your soul from every defilement of sin, and render your sacrifice acceptable to God.

You tell me that your Protestant friends are continually teasing you concerning the necessity of confession, and that they cannot conceive what you can have to carry to the tribunal of penance. As for themselves, they posi-



tively declare that they would be at a loss to find out in their sentiments and actions, a matter of confession ; excepting, perhaps, those excusable failings, which are the usual appendages of our weak human nature, but which never amount to those grievous sins which provoke the wrath of the Almighty. I shall not presume here to scrutinize their conscience, and call them to an exact investigation and account of their whole life. I wish they may not be deluded, and the favourable opinion which they have of themselves, may be ratified by the judgment of the sovereign Judge. I shall only say, without fear of being contradicted, that the number of Christians, and even of Catholics who are well acquainted and always guided by the precepts of the Gospel, is not so great as it is confidently asserted.

The true spirit of Christianity is little known, and sometimes even among people who make a profession of piety, and cannot be reproached with those actions which are with one accord condemned as criminal or vicious by the world ; relying on the approbation of others and the testimony of their conscience, that no glaring infringement of the divine and social laws cannot be laid to their charge, such as murder, theft, adultery, breach of faith, injustice, calumny, &c. &c. ; and that they perform with fidelity those exterior practices of religious worship which are of strict obligation ; they fondly persuade themselves that there is in their conduct no matter of confession ; but they very seldom examine themselves on the duties of their state of life and their habitual dispositions. They idle away their time without scrupulosity in softness, effeminacy, amusements, unprofitable readings, useless conversations and visits. A few moments are scarcely devoted to the service of God, and even these few moments are too often distracted by vain thoughts or worldly cares, either wilfully indulged or negligently repelled. There

are besides many precepts to which they pay no attention, and consequently, upon which they never examine themselves. It is a precept to lead a laborious and penitential life: "If any man will not work, neither let him eat:" 2 Thess. ii. 10. "Except you do penance, you shall all perish."—Luke xiii. 5. It is a precept to strive to advance every day in virtue: "Be you perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."—Matt. v. 48. It is a precept to watch and pray, to escape the snares of the devil and the seductions of self-love: "Watch ye, praying at all times . . . that ye enter not into temptation."—Luke and Matt. It is a precept to express our gratitude to God for all his benefits: "Giving thanks always in all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father."—Eph. v. 20. It is a precept to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to procure him all the assistance in our power, either corporal or spiritual: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."—Matt. xix. 19. "In this we have known of God, because he has laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."—1 John iii. 16. Temperance, fortitude, justice, prudence, humility, forbearance, meekness, modesty, forgiveness of injuries, love of our enemies; in short, all virtues, we are strictly bound to keep our hearts in the habitual disposition of putting in practice when occasions occur. When people have corrected some shocking and disgraceful vices or defects in themselves, and live in an honourable manner, they are quite happy; but a thorough change of the heart, the mortification of the passions, and renouncing the vanities of the world, they regard as the effects of the exaggerated notions of an ill understood, or at least unnecessary devotion. They may be irreprehensible in the sight of men, but they are deficient in an essential point; they are destitute of the Spirit of God. Their

exterior actions are exempt from blame, but the principle of them is corrupted; they speak the words and do the works of God, but they are not influenced or actuated by divine grace; they have within a worm that gnaws the root of their good deeds, and deprives them from life. Sometimes it will be a secret vanity, a hidden jealousy, a creature which they prefer before the Creator. This is their crime. But they commit it under such specious pretences, they know to adorn it with such fair colouring, that they have the misfortune of deceiving themselves as well as others. There would be no sin nor imperfection in loving what they love, and seeking what they wish for; their sin consists in tending and attaching themselves to it, as the chief object of their love, and their last end. They are edifying, they enjoy the reputation of being the best among the good. Yet, with all their splendid virtues, from want of practising them from pure motives, and in reference to the greater glory of God and the accomplishment of his will, they are in reality but half and nominal Christians; and if they do not endeavour to sanctify their intentions, they run a very great risk to be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Oh! were we to enter into a strict reckoning with ourselves, and examine our conscience according to these undeniable principles of Gospel morality; instead of that unfortunate presumption which blinds our understanding and hides from us our daily transgressions, we should find an ample matter of accusations; penetrated with a deep sense of our manifold miseries, we should cry up to God, "If thou, O Lord, will mark out iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it. Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight no man shall be justified."---- Psalm.

What usually diminishes in Christians the horror and dread of sin, is a want of solid instruction. Our soul,

entirely buried in the senses, is only struck by sensible objects. One is slightly affected by the grievousness of a sin that kills the soul and separates her eternally from God, because that grievousness is a spiritual thing. One is sometimes seized with fright and terror at the thought of the eternal misery reserved for sinners, but not at the deformity and heinousness of the transgression to which the punishment is due. One is on the contrary too often tempted to think that the pain surpasses the offence, and that God is too severe to punish transitory infidelities by eternal torments. Thus a sin which effaces the sacred seal of our salvation, the features and character of children of God, and render us his enemies, is looked upon as an excusable weakness, the necessary consequence of an insurmountable propensity; the effect of age, constitution, temper, and circumstances; whilst the eternal truth which sin outrages, the justice of God which it defies, the ingratitude which it betrays, the order of Divine Providence which it destroys, sanctity which it disgraces, charity which it extinguishes, vices and crimes which it encourages and promotes, the eternal felicity from which it deprives, and the sufferings with which it will be eternally attended, are quickly obliterated from the mind, because they are not visible to the eyes. In short, sin is little dreaded, because its enormity is little known. Hence that unaccountable security in which so many people live in the midst of the most imminent dangers. Hence their profound ignorance and illusion respecting the state of their conscience. Hence the want of integrity in so many confessions.

You ask me what length of time before confession you should employ to excite in you sentiments of sorrow for your sins, and how to make an act of contrition. As you examine your conscience every night on your daily

failings, in the holy dispositions with which God has inspired you, it is impossible that you should forget considerable faults, and had you committed any, you would certainly have immediately implored God's pardon. I do not, therefore, think that your preparation for confession should be long. Do not exhaust yourself in fruitless efforts to recal to your remembrance all which you may have done amiss, a moderate space of time for your examination, and to excite yourself to contrition is sufficient. Alas! were we to dedicate a whole week in order to remember all the frailties and imperfections into which we fall during the short space of one single day, we should have still to say, "O Lord, forgive us our hidden sins." As for a *sensible* sorrow, although it is desirable, yet it is not absolutely necessary; it is a gift which God grants or refuses as he pleases, and knows to be more advantageous to our soul. Sincere contrition, or the true conversion of the heart, consists in an unfeigned detestation of sin, a firm purpose of amendment, and an unshaken resolution to repair the past, and accomplish, in all things, the will of God. The act of contrition requisite in the sacrament of penance does not consist in a particular set form of words: and how long it must last is nowhere precisely regulated. St. Francis of Sales says, "that scarcely any time is necessary to make it well, since nothing more is required than to prostrate ourselves before God in a spirit of humility and repentance for having offended him."—Spir. Ent. xviii. Indeed, there is no doubt that the act of contrition of the publican, mentioned in the Gospel, had all the necessary conditions; since our Lord said he had obtained by it the forgiveness of his sins. "I say to you, that this man went down to his house justified." Yet it contained only these few words: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."—Luke xviii. 13, 14. Do

not, therefore, torment yourself with anxious solicitude in order to be assured that you have repeated with exactness every word of the formula of the act of contrition which you make, either before your confession or immediately before the absolution of the priest. Believe me, to endeavour to be penetrated with deep sorrow for having offended God, ought to be much more attended to than any precisely fixed time, or the most pathetic set form of words. Strong and habitual sentiments of the heinousness of sin, and of the infinite perfections of God should be so natural to us as to arise of themselves whenever we present ourselves to the tribunal of penance, without our being in need to use violence or long considerations to excite them in our heart. You have, in your prayer-books, preparatory prayers for confession, which you can employ with great propriety, or any other as you like best. Be guided in choice by the salutary effects which you may have experienced.

It is true that a *vague* detestation of sin, considered *in general*, is not sufficient in the sacrament of penance to obtain the benefit of absolution. The penitent must have actually in view and detest *all* mortal sins which he has committed, and which he has confessed or intended to confess, and besides, be firmly resolved never to commit them again for the future. There ought not to be the least restriction or reserve; all the sins which he has been guilty of must be the object of his contrition: were he to preserve any affection for a particular mortal sin, and not sincerely be determined never to relapse into it, and avoid the occasions of it, however lively his contrition might be with regard to his other sins, it would be of no avail, he would remain guilty in the sight of God. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, but offend in one point, is become guilty of all."—James ii. 10.

"When we have said that we ought to detest all the

mortal sins which we have committed. We have never pretended that there was a strict obligation to make as many acts of contrition as the mortal sins which we may have been guilty of, or to make a particular act of contrition for each particular kind of sin. Divines do not believe that the justice of God requires from sinners that special application of acts of contrition to each sin, or each kind of sin. One ought to examine oneself with care in order to know which are the faults one may have fallen into; try to remember them all (as far as it is possible), detest them all, reflect upon them all, and take a firm resolution never to commit them again for the future, which can be done in a single act of contrition, which is the result of the previous good dispositions, as St. Thomas says, in conformity with the sentiments of St. Austin, who likewise says, that "a single moment is sufficient to incline the heart, either to good or evil, which made St. Francis of Sales declare, that "scarcely any time is necessary to make an act of contrition."—Conf. d'Angers. Therefore, I shall tell you with the great and learned Bossuet, "Do not inquire and be uneasy how God will purify your soul from the sins which you may have forgotten in your confession, and of course which were not present to your mind when you made your act of confession. Provided you be animated with the good dispositions which I have just described, believe and rely upon these words of our blessed Redeemer: "Many sins have been forgiven her because she has loved much."—Luke vii. 47. You may not remember, or give a very clear and circumstantial account of all your thoughts and feelings from one confession to another; you may not have distinctly in your remembrance all the sins which you have committed, when you make an act of contrition; but, without doubt, it was not of sins in general which you were

sorry for, but of those sins which you had already confessed, which is sufficient. “Quand nous avons dit qu’il faut détester tous les péchés mortels qu’on a commis, nous n’avons pas prétendu qu’on soit absolument obligé, de faire autant d’actes de contrition qu’on a commis de péchés mortels, ni même qu’on soit obligé, de faire des actes de contrition de chaque espèce de péché . . . Les théologiens ne croient pas que la justice divine exige des pécheurs cette application particulière d’actes de contrition à chaque péché, ou chaque espèce de péché. Il faut entrer dans l’examen des fautes que l’on a commises, se les rappeler toutes dans la mémoire, autant qu’il est possible ; réfléchir dessus, former la résolution de ne plus les commettre, ce qui peut se faire, selon St. Thomas par un seul acte de contrition qui agit en vertu des dispositions précédentes—à quoi l’on peut joindre ce que dit St. Augustin, qu’il ne faut qu’un moment pour que le cœur se tourne vers le bien ou le mal. Ce qui a fait dire à St. François de Sales (Entr. xviii.) qu’il ne faut presque point de temps pour bien faire un acte de contrition, puis qu’il ne faut autre chose que de se prosterner devant Dieu en esprit d’humilité et se repentir de l’avoir offensé.”—Conf. d’Angers.

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### XXIII.

#### CHOICE OF A CONFESSOR.

Being exposed from circumstances entirely independent of your choice, to change often the place of your residence, I consider it as a duty incumbent upon me to give you some directions, with regard to the confessor to



whom you may be obliged to address yourself. In order to preserve the eternal life of our soul, we should do what we never failed to do for the preservation of the frail and ephemeral life of the body. When we are ill, we have recourse to the most experienced physician, and skilful surgeon. Do the same respecting the health of your soul ; rely only on the direction which is upright, wise, prudent, enlightened, and disinterested. Never apply for advice to men destitute of experience, and whom you may have solid reasons to suspect of being susceptible to be influenced in their decisions by selfish views, human respect, or worldly considerations ; and who, as the Scripture says, “ sow cushions under every elbow, and make pillows for the heads of sinners.”—Ezek. xiii. 18. When you are determined to settle in a place for a length of time, you will do well to inquire who, among the clergy near you, is the priest who enjoys the reputation of piety, learning, experience, and humility and discretion, and who in the advice which he gives, is well known to be guided by prudence, and the motives of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Could you put in practice what St. Francis of Sales recommends, and choose *among a thousand*, the Raphael who is to direct you in the paths of virtue, I should be the first to exhort you to leave nothing undone, till you have found out that precious treasure. But the thing is scarcely possible for Catholics living in a Protestant country, and of course, is not obligatory. The distance between Catholic congregations, and the scarcity of priests, will almost always put you under the necessity of applying to, and being contented with the missionary of the place where you live. He may not have all the qualities which you may wish for, he will have imperfections, since he is a man, and perhaps some exterior defects which may inspire you with a sort of repugnance, and

tempt you to have no confidence in him. Was it not said of St. Paul, that "his epistles were weighty and strong, but his bodily presence weak, and his speech contemptible."—2 Cor. x. 10. But if we were to obey the pastors of the Church only when they would have attained perfection, we should never have an occasion of practising obedience; we should be, during our whole life, left without guides and support. Always bear in mind that, though the functions of priests be sublime, yet they are imperfect beings, liable to mistakes. Nay, it may sometimes happen that some might do things which would not be reconcilable with their sacred character; but the faults of the few ought not to be laid to the charge of the whole clergy. Besides, if we would not go to confession but to an impeccable or infallible priest, we should for ever abandon the sacrament of penance. The imperfections or faults of the ministers of God do not deprive them of the authority with which they have been invested for the good of the faithful. "Whatever they shall say to you," says our divine Saviour, speaking of the Pharisees, "observe and do; but according to their works, do ye not."—Matt. xxiii. 2.

Let us not be over curious and delicate with regard to the conduct of those who are to be our spiritual guides, or those who preach to us the word of God, but let us receive with gratitude the food of the children of God, whatever may be the hand that distributes it to us, and respect the voice of the pastor even in the mouth of the hireling. Let us never allow ourselves to say that we have discovered the weak side of the one, the human motives of the other: a vain, useless, uncharitable investigation, and almost always a rash and false judgment; for too often people imagine that they discover blemishes in unblemished characters. But supposing that our conjectures should be well grounded; is it a wonder to find out

sins in sinners, and in men the defects of mankind? Were we to meet with a confessor who in every respect is not such a one as we expected, let us act through faith and only considering the man Jesus Christ, whom he represents, accuse ourselves of our sins to him with simplicity, listen to his instructions with deference, obey him with respect, and receive the benefit of absolution with humility, compunction, and gratitude.

Most probably the gentleman to whom you will be obliged to address yourself, will not bear the least resemblance with the priest who has instructed you, and heard your first confession, because each man has a character and manner peculiar to himself. But what does it signify, provided he holds the same doctrine, and advises and guides you according to the maxims of the Gospel? What does it signify if the heavenly medicine be contained in an earthen or golden vessel, provided it be presented to us by the order of God? If we take it with submission, whatever may be the hand he makes use of, notwithstanding our repugnance, it will operate a more speedy and lasting cure than if we had been served according to our inclination. What are we to wish for but God alone? Shall we reject his gifts unless he communicates them to us through the medium of a priest according to our liking? If in the ministers of the church we seek God alone, we are well assured to find him, and with him spiritual lights, peace, and comfort; but if we seek ourselves, we shall meet with disappointments and troubles: our self-love gratified will be our torment and just punishment. Your confessor being placed at the head of a congregation, you have the best reasons to believe that he is endowed with all the knowledge and virtues requisite to discharge with edification the important functions of his sacred ministry. For, certainly, were there any thing questionable or sus-

picious, either in his principles or conduct, your pious and learned bishop would never have intrusted him with the care of souls. Moreover, we ought to be persuaded that God will never permit that the faithful who are sincerely desirous of their salvation, and seeking with uprightness and simplicity the best means of advancing in virtue, should be led astray by the pastors under the guidance of whom, conformably with the order of Divine Providence, they are obliged to walk. Knowing the purity of their intentions, he will supply by the interior unction of his grace, and the lights of the Holy Ghost what may be deficient in his ministers. Go therefore to your actual confessor with confidence, God will put on his lips words of wisdom and salvation, to direct you. Perhaps he will be of greater benefit to your soul, than another more agreeable to your feelings, because then you will be compelled to behold in him the minister of the church, the dispenser of the mysteries of God, and not the man of your choice, and thus in obeying him you will not be exposed to the danger of obeying the creature rather than the Creator.

You have often spoken to me of your gratitude towards your first confessor. I shall not blame this sentiment, provided it is confined within due bounds, and may not be the cause of objections or repugnances respecting the other confessors whom Divine Providence will appoint for you. When some unsought-for occasion of speaking of him presents itself you may do it without scrupulosity, but without those highflown praises which are almost always suspected of blindness, partiality, or exaggeration. Gratitude is a Christian virtue which we are authorized to practise towards those who have been serviceable to us in spiritual as well as temporal concerns. But be careful not to imitate those persons who, prepossessed with the real or exaggerated merit of the guide of their

soul, foolishly fancy that they never will meet with any other equally suitable to their spiritual wants. Therefore, if by the instructions and exhortations of your first confessor, you have been moved to compunction, encouraged in the accomplishment of your duties, supported and comforted in your trials, beware not to attribute to the man these precious favours, he was only the instrument of which God made use to bestow his graces upon you. How great soever the benefits may be which you derive from your communications with the creature, always remember that God is the chief benefactor. "Neither he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth thee increase."—1 Cor. iii. 7. To him alone ultimately and above all things gratitude is due. Men pass rapidly away as a fleeting dream: the best are still full of imperfections, and the assistance and consolations which they can afford, are frail and transitory like themselves. "Cursed be the man," says the prophet, "that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm."—Jerem. xvii. 5. But if you put an unbounded confidence in the grace of God, and the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, you are assured never to be left alone or destitute. Amidst the hardest trials, and the most perplexing occurrences, you will always have near at hand an unerring guide, a bosom friend, an all-powerful protector. "They that trust in the Lord, shall be as mount Sion, they shall not be moved for ever. . . . He that hopeth in the Lord shall never be confounded."—Ps. The best testimony of gratitude which you can give to your first confessor, is to remember him in your prayers, that God may vouchsafe not to look down with severe justice upon his unworthiness but have mercy on him, and bestow his blessings upon his labours.

Since the great distance from the place of your confessor's residence, in which you are now, renders your

spiritual relations extremely difficult and almost impossible, it is an evident proof that he is no longer the ANANY who is to guide you in the paths of virtue. Never listen to the repugnances of nature, nor put off from day to day to address yourself to the priest of the congregation. I appeal to you if you were sick, would you obstinately refuse to take the remedies which could restore you to health, because they were not prescribed or presented by the physician whom you were in the habit of consulting? What would you think of a woman who would reject with disdain the salutary cordial which could repair her exhausted strength, because it is not contained in the glass which she was accustomed to make use of? I leave to your sound judgment to make the application, and draw the consequence. There is I own an inconvenience in a frequent change of confessors; for these changes, when they are the result of inconstancy and caprice, are apt to produce perplexities of mind. Instead of advancing in virtue by variety of directions, one is stopped at every step, and at a loss to choose between different methods and decisions; nay it often happens that at the end one follows only one's sentiments and opinions. When people are so overnice and delicate with regard to their *usual* confessor, it is much to be feared that they are far from being animated with the Spirit of God. If they considered in their confessor, Jesus Christ alone, all those niceties, delicacies, and refinements of piety would not exist. Therefore never change the confessor whom circumstances have given you, unless you are compelled to do it from a real necessity.

I am thoroughly persuaded of your sincerity when you speak to your director in the tribunal of penance. You carry even too far the fear of being guilty of omission or disguise, and in every occasion you have opened

your heart with a candour very edifying. However, as you wish to know all that may be conducive to your improvement, I shall not hide from you, that you are still in want of simplicity, and to the want of this virtue ought to be attributed in great measure many of those perplexities, which prompt you to repeat the same thing in different ways, and over and over again. If instead of those long-drawn reflections on the manner in which you should express yourself, you were to declare your faults or doubts with simplicity, such as they appear to you, a few words would suffice to be well understood, and would save you many useless and painful repetitions. The vague and embarrassed manner in which sometimes you make your confession, does not proceed, I am assured of it, from the remotest wish of excusing or palliating your failings, but from the exaggerated fear of saying too much or too little, using some improper expression, or hurting charity by discovering indirectly the faults of others, by an open and unreserved disclosure of your own. That delicacy or attention to propriety and prudence, I very much commend and approve, provided it is confined within due bounds; but self-love is so ingenious to deceive us under the most specious and laudable pretences, that without being aware of the delusion, this excessive delicacy and those great precautions are often dictated by a false shame, or some human respect. It is therefore of the highest importance to be on our guard, and scrutinize with impartiality our secret motives, when we feel ourselves induced to use some reserve in the manifestation of our conscience to our spiritual guide.

Another cause of your postponing from day to day to go to confession, is the labour and painful study which you employ in your preparation, and the excessive fatigue which is the result. So that the thought of

passing again through that hard trial, fills your heart with sadness and dejection, and makes you put off your confession as long as possible. But give me leave to tell it you, what you suffer is your own work and not the necessary appendage of the sacrament of penance; for the yoke of our Lord is always sweet, whilst that which you impose upon yourself is insupportable. Let us become simple like little children; let us prostrate ourselves with profound humility at the feet of Jesus Christ, like Magdalen, and then the confession of our sins will not cost us violent efforts: we shall declare them without that false shame, or secret and selfish regard to ourselves which are the source of the perplexities and constraint which we experience.

To feel it hard to declare all our weaknesses and transgressions without disguise, there is no sin, provided we have the courage of resisting the temptation of using some little dissimulation. For it sometimes happens that the sinner, without having a positive intention to hide a sin of which he is particularly ashamed, yet in order to avoid the confusion which a plain declaration of it would make him feel, places that declaration in the midst of other faults, which in his opinion are less heinous and disgraceful, and in such a manner as not to strike the attention of the confessor; which is an evident proof that he is much more affected at the necessity of confessing his sin, than at the regret and contrition for having committed it. A sincere penitent acts with greater simplicity and candour; he is solicitous and delicate only concerning his salvation. He does not trouble himself about the judgment which his confessor will form of his conduct. He knows that by yielding to his criminal passions, he has lost his innocence, incurred the wrath of God, and consequently forfeited the titles which he might have had to esteem and considera-



tion. He is too well aware that he would be guilty of the most heinous hypocrisy, were he to attempt in declaring his sins, to do it in such a disguised manner, as to appear less culpable than he is actually. Instead of indulging pride and human feelings, he considers with most lively sentiments of gratitude as unmerited favour and mercy of God towards him, to be allowed to confess only to a man who is obliged to an inviolable secrecy, sins which divine justice might compel him to declare in the face of heaven and earth. This conviction makes him overcome all the suggestions of our corrupt nature, and guides him in the accusation of his faults in the tribunal of penance, and thus inspires him with a confident hope that they will be forgiven.

There is no doubt that the penitent in the tribunal of penance is strictly bound never to disclose, either openly or by the most distant hints, the faults of others. He is there it is true, the informer, accuser, and witness, but only against himself. It is of his faults, sins, or omissions of which he is there summoned to give an account; and were he so ignorant of his duties, so indiscreet, or careless, as to inform or bear testimony against another, he would be guilty of injustice, uncharitableness, and detraction. There are people who are not always as attentive and cautious in this regard, as they ought to be. It is true that, in some peculiar circumstances, it may be next to impossible to the penitent not to give to his confessor some indirect knowledge of another's sin. For instance, if a mother has the misfortune of seeing the father of her children leading a profligate life, and seducing them by his example and discourses from the paths of virtue, and using every means in his power to prevent her from accomplishing her religious duties; who could reproach a woman placed in such hard circumstances, and often at a loss

what to do, with asking the advice of her confessor? It is only in such or similar extraordinary cases, that the manifestation of the wrongs or sins of another can be tolerated or excused. In any other it is always a fault, and sometimes a very grievous fault. It is also particularly recommended never to deviate in the declaration of sins, from those rules of modesty and decorum which the sanctity of the sacrament requires. But one ought at the same time to beware of being overnice, or giving way to scrupulosity; for, a constant experience teaches that, from a want of right notions on this delicate matter, there are some who enter into useless, unprofitable, and improper details; whilst others, from scrupulosity, give but a very imperfect knowledge of their conscience, and thus deprive themselves of an advice suitable to their actual wants, and remain exposed to the danger of indulging their natural inclinations.

I have more than once met with penitents whom from their evasive answers, half declarations, hesitation, or silence, I might have suspected to have committed some very grievous sins; but, as I was acquainted with their dispositions and character, I did not ask them many questions, I tried only by gentle exhortations to remove their groundless fears, and encourage them to speak with simplicity; and when I succeeded, I always found to their great comfort as well as mine, that the thing which had kept them upon the rack till they had declared it, was some venial fault or vain scrupulosity which would have cost them nothing to confess, had they used plain terms. Moreover, when you are obliged to go to confession to a priest who is utterly unacquainted with you or the circumstances in which you are placed, I exhort you both for his sake as well as yours, to speak in a plain and explicit manner; for, were you to hesitate, and appear embarrassed, he would consider it as a duty

incumbent upon him to ask you questions which might be quite unnecessary, which he would not have done had you not exhibited some perplexity or trouble.

Seek only to make yourself known, and say *all* that which is requisite for this purpose with perfect liberty of mind, without preparing your sentences, and arranging and weighing your words beforehand. Come to the point all at once, retrenching whatever is not indispensable to give to your director a clear knowledge of your faults, propensities, and ordinary temptations. The misfortune is, that several pious women falsely imagine that they are not sufficiently understood, or that there is a great deficiency in the integrity of their confessions, if they are not indulged in the enumeration of minute and insignificant circumstances which they think have been the cause of, or attended the sins which they have to confess. Oh! if they were sensible how precious is the time of a priest who has the care of souls, and is under the obligation of labouring for the conversion of sinners, praying for his own wants and the necessities of the Church, and employing his leisure hours in studying and meditating on the law of God, they would be afraid lest they should idle away such precious time in superfluous discourses. Penitents should always keep in their minds, that the moments of their confessor are not at his disposal, and consequently that, without solid reasons, they should not divert him from his other occupations and good works. It is from a want of humility that people use so many circumlocutions before they declare what is essential, and not unfrequently from a secret desire of exciting the interest of the minister of God, and enjoying human consolations, instead of seeking an unprejudiced decision, and the most proper means of serving God with greater purity by daily dying to themselves. I shall

not speak here of other inconveniences attending too long confessions and endless consultations. Besides the loss of time, they give occasion to people of the world to turn into ridicule the most essential duties of religion, and expose her ministers to slanders and suspicions; than which nothing should be more carefully avoided. If in all our religious exercises, and particularly in the manifestation of our hearts, we sought only to correct our defects, renounce our judgment, and obey with simplicity, direction would not require so much time, and there would be no need of so many consultations.

These considerations should not, however, hinder you from consulting your spiritual guide, and having recourse to the sacrament of penance, whenever you feel the want of this spiritual remedy. We have, I acknowledge it, the divine Scriptures, many pious books and treatises of spirituality, which contain all the principles and rules of conduct which we ought to follow in order to work out our salvation and advance in virtue. If we do not deviate from the straight road which they point out to us, it is true that we run no risk of being led astray; but it is the application of these holy principles and rules to our actual circumstances, and the regulation of our daily actions, which is not so easy in practice as it may appear in theory. Sometimes we are visited with troubles and perplexities, from which, left to our sole exertions, we cannot be delivered. At other times we feel a weariness and disgust of all that is good and holy, of which we can assign no cause, or even give no clear account, and, of course, which we do not know how to remove. Yet this disposition insensibly leads to negligence and tepidity. In unforeseen reverses of fortune, who will encourage us to bear them with patience, fortitude, and resignation? We may find ourselves involved in intricate difficulties, and from the party

which we shall embrace, our eternal as well as temporal happiness may depend. We may be assailed by the most alluring and dangerous temptations. In short, under the various and severe trials to which we are exposed during our earthly pilgrimage, who will be our support? who will guide our uncertain and tottering steps on the brink of so many precipices with which we are surrounded? who will afford us a timely assistance when we feel our courage failing and all our strength gone? Books? Alas! in great troubles, and when we are under the influence of violent passions, they are but dumb advisers, unsafe guides, and insignificant comforters. Shall we, then, take no other guide but ourselves? But we are ourselves in the most urgent need of being guided, since we are weak, blind, tempted, struggling against our natural propensities, and it is from ourselves that our most seducing temptations arise; in fine, since we are ourselves our most cruel enemies. We are not courageous and strong for a long time when it is against ourselves we have to fight. The combats which we have to sustain against ourselves, and our own cupidity, are too hard to let us entertain a confident hope of gaining the victory. We want, therefore, an exterior help distinct from ourselves, a friend and adviser free from our errors, exempt from the delusions of our self-love, uninfluenced by our passions, and thus well qualified to tear off the veil which hides the truth from our enchanted eyes, break our chains, and as zealous to procure our amendment as we are prone to flatter ourselves. And who can be this disinterested, impartial, trusty friend, prudent and enlightened adviser, if not the man of God? He alone holding the place of Jesus Christ, speaking in his name, animated with his spirit, can, through the influence of his all-powerful grace, dissipate the clouds which overwhelm

our understanding, and calm the storms which would otherwise cast our frail vessel against quicksands and hidden rocks.

In the institution of the sacrament of penance our divine Saviour has fulfilled the promise which he had made not to leave us orphans. He permanently dwells with us through the ministry of the successors of the apostles, and of the priests lawfully delegated by them to guide the faithful in the paths of virtue. By them he continues to exercise the functions of goodness and beneficence which he had constantly performed during the days of his mortal existence, "going about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed."—Acts x. 38. To them we are authorized, nay even compelled, to apply in our spiritual necessities. Whatever may be their age, sex, condition, ignorance, learning, prosperous or adverse fortune, all Catholics have a sacred and incontrovertible right to the care, interest, and advice of their spiritual guide. And considering himself as accountable to God for the salvation of the souls committed to him, he neglects nothing which may contribute to their temporal and eternal happiness. A confessor penetrated with the awful responsibility of his holy obligations is animated towards his penitents with the charity of St. Paul; he "longs after them in the bowels of Jesus Christ."—Phil. i. 8. To him they can unfold with liberty all the recesses of their soul, manifest their most shameful propensities, and even heinous crimes, without fear of meeting a harsh reception, or of their secrets being ever betrayed. He will make no other use of their confidence but to show them the depth of the precipice into which they have fallen, stretch forth to them a friendly hand to help them to be rescued from it, and offer his most earnest prayers to the Almighty, in order to obtain their reconciliation with

him. Although he may say with the same apostle, "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I am not on fire?" yet without partaking in and approving of their criminal pursuits, he still loves them, sympathizes with their woes, does his utmost to alleviate them, and is so "desirous of them, that he would gladly impart unto them not only the Gospel of Christ, but also his own soul, because they are become most dear unto him."—1 Thess. ii. 8. Like a skilful and compassionate physician well acquainted with all the diseases of the human heart, he will never inflict any necessary wound without applying at the same time upon it a softening and healing balsam, nor administer any remedy but the best adapted to the strength or weakness of his patients, and the most proper to effectuate a speedy and lasting cure. A wise, learned, experienced, and disinterested counsel, whose tender concern for them will not make him blind to their faults, but on the contrary will give him the most piercing eyes to discover the smallest spots and blemishes, he will never give but the advice the most conducive to extricate them from their difficulties. An unprejudiced, impartial, and equitable judge, he will weigh in the balance of the strictest justice all the charges against them, never condemn them unheard, and when compelled to pronounce the verdict, guilty, he will immediately offer to them the most efficacious means of reversing the sentence, obtaining a full pardon, and even the recovery of their justly-forfeited rights and privileges. An affectionate father, he will never forsake them in the day of distress. A most tender mother, "he will be again in labour of them until Christ be formed in their hearts."—Col. iv. 19. The danger of catching an infectious disease, and even the certainty of death, will never deter him from attending them on

the bed of sickness, and procure them, with unwearied assiduity and sweetest attentions, all the help and comfort in his power. In fine, the minister of God, the representative of our crucified Saviour and constant Lover, he will in their last moments assist them, and by his paternal and pathetic exhortations revive their drooping spirits, fortify their faith, and animate them with the sentiments of piety the most suitable to the awful circumstance, and the most capable of inspiring them with confidence and resignation; thus rendering by his paternal and pious labours, more easy their final separation from their friends assuaging the pangs of agony, and forwarding the admittance of their souls into the regions of eternal bliss. How many young persons of either sex, by their filial and unreserved confidence in their ghostly fathers, have been preserved from falling into the snares artfully laid under their feet, and which their inexperience could have never discovered! How many people of a more mature age, in those unprecedented and calamitous events, which our weak nature left to itself could never bear, have been saved from despair by a timely disclosure of their direful situation to their confessor, and by the words of consolation issuing from his mouth, and through the grace of God, penetrating like a refreshing and reviving dew to their broken hearts, have been reanimated with a supernatural fortitude, and restored to society and their disconsolate friends. How many sinners whose eternal loss seemed almost inevitable, on account of their long and accumulated transgressions, have been, through the medium of confession, brought to a sense of their imminent danger, the necessity of breaking their criminal connexions, and thus led to a sincere conversion. Such is the inestimable resource which the Catholic Church affords to her children in all the vicissitudes and trials of this transitory life. Oh! if our Protestant brethren



could be made sensible of this unquestionable truth, they would bewail with the most bitter tears, the blindness and infatuation of the authors of their religion, and candidly acknowledge, that by retrenching the sacrament of penance, they have proved themselves to have been deluded by the spirit of error, and deprived their followers of the most efficacious preservative against vice, and greatest encouragement in the practice of virtue. I advise you, therefore, never to be deterred by any human motive from consulting your *spiritual* guide, on your *spiritual* concerns. I exhort you to submit to his decisions with the docility of a little child.

Although I advise you to lay aside all punctilio, and speak to your confessor with filial liberty and confidence, yet do not contract the habit to go to him, in order to have a solution for every doubt, or trifling difficulty which may pass through your imagination. This frequent recurrence to his judgment, would, by insensible degrees, lead you to make no use of your own in the most common occurrences of life ; and, notwithstanding the sound understanding, and well-informed mind which the Almighty has been pleased to favour you with, you would soon, with regard to your mental faculties, become like those fine and delicate ladies who, from the convenience of having a carriage, horses, and servants, always at their command, cannot do the least thing for themselves, and walk a few steps without being quite spent, unless they have an arm to lean upon and support them, although they have received from nature a strong and healthy constitution. Thus, you would gradually fall into such an habitual state of indecision, as to be almost incapable of judging what you can with safety think, say, or do, whenever you are prevented from consulting your confessor, than which nothing is more inconsistent with reason and solid and enlightened piety. “ Prove all things,” says

St. Paul, "hold fast that which is good."—1 Thess. v. 21. I have often repeated to you this Gospel maxim: "Unless you become as a little child, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."—Matt. xviii. 3. But it is by endeavouring to acquire the humility, candour, docility, innocence, and simplicity, which are the amiable characteristics of well-born children; and not by remaining for ever in a state of infancy, so as to require a nurse at your elbow to carry you in her arms, or support you by leading-strings at every step you take. Religion, well understood, whilst it preserves from presumption, enlarges the mind, dilates the heart, and inspires with an humble courage and modest liberty.

To these considerations permit me to add an advice which I thought unnecessary to give you during the course of your instructions. But the danger of being deprived of the consolations of religion which you have run in your last sickness, does not allow me to remain silent. I shall now, therefore, freely communicate my reflections to you on the subject, as your perfect recovery makes me entertain a confident hope that the Almighty will preserve your precious life for many years to come, for the happiness of your family, and the edification of your friends and acquaintances. Divine Providence having so ordained every thing, as there is not the least prospect of our meeting together on this side of the grave, my observations cannot be suspected of being dictated by personal motives.

That a young lady brought up in all the prejudices and false notions which her Protestant parents and teachers have instilled into her mind respecting the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and especially the sacrament of penance, should, after her conversion, despite of her best endeavours, feel an involuntary difficulty to declare her failings, and some embarrassment in

seeing her confessor, I easily conceive, and I sincerely sympathize with her feelings. But as it might happen that she be dangerously ill, and in this case seeing her confessor, could not be dispensed with, and being seen by him, it is highly important for her not to fill up her mind with vain and ill-grounded frights, and not to wait the occurrence of a malady to overcome her timidity and bashfulness ; because the efforts which she would make then to get the better of her feelings might be attended with fatal consequences. The fear of an unusual and painful interview, might induce her to postpone it as long as possible, and perhaps till it is too late to reap a real benefit from it. Supposing, that at the first information or idea of danger, she would have courage enough to send immediately for him, his visit in such a circumstance cannot fail to make a deep impression upon her. Being in the habit of shunning his presence, she will not consider him then, as a tender and compassionate father who comes to console, encourage, and support his beloved child on the bed of sickness, but only as the minister of God commissioned to admonish her, to "give charge concerning her house, for she is going to die and not to live."—4 Kings xxi. 1. Is it not to be feared lest such awful prospect should excite in her strong emotions, and the violence which she will use to stifle them may stop the beneficial effect of the remedies, and bring on a crisis which may endanger her life, or render the recovery longer and more difficult? This is not a mere conjecture ; it is from the apprehension of such accidents manifested by physicians, relatives, or friends, that many Christians depart from this life, without having received the rites of the Church, and the spiritual and too often indispensable assistance of which they were in need : whilst a daily experience evidently proves that the reception of the sacraments,

by establishing the soul in a state of peace and tranquillity, inspiring her with patience, resignation, and confidence in God, contributes to lessen and assuage the pains of the body, and thus often disposes it to derive the most effectual benefit from the administered remedies.

Do not imagine that your confessor keeps always present to his mind what you may have told him in the tribunal of penance. On this groundless idea be not constrained or out of countenance when you meet him, for civility requires of you to speak to him. Banish such troublesome thoughts. The gentleman whom you see among your friends and acquaintances, is no longer the priest to whom you have laid open all the secrets of your heart, although he bears the same name, and has the same features. In the tribunal of penance he is the representative and delegate of Jesus Christ; and in this quality, all your defects as well as good qualities, he must remember, in order to be able to give you instructions appropriate to your actual circumstances and wants. Out of that sacred place he knows no more of what you have done, or of your inward dispositions, than what you manifest yourself of them by your own words or exterior conduct; even to *yourself and alone*, he cannot make the least allusion to what you may have declared to him in confession. The practical conclusion which you ought to draw from these observations is, never to shun the company of your confessor, when he comes to pay to your husband or to you a visit of politeness or neighbourhood, but to behave towards him, and speak to him with affability, as to any other gentleman. Thus you will be at liberty, and feel no repugnance nor difficulty, when you cannot help seeing or speaking to him without witness, as in case of sickness.

When you have any prayer *to say* for your penance

you would not satisfy the obligation, were you to read it only without pronouncing the words, or meditate upon it. It must be recited. But it would be as useless as improper to divert your attention from the sense of the prayer, in order to hear yourself pronounce every word or syllable. This laborious attention would be a continual distraction, and in reality nothing but a painful and scrupulous anxiety about the motion of the lips and the tongue, disgraceful to an enlightened devotion, and which would prevent any pious sentiment being excited in the heart. Provided you say your penance slowly, attentively, and distinctly, and are conscious that you are reciting, you must go on without any further solicitude. To miss a few words through inadvertency, to commit faults against the rules of grammar, and such like trifles, is not to be minded. This is applicable to all vocal prayers either of obligation or devotion.

When I recommend to you obedience and submission to the decisions of your confessor, and to prefer his opinion or judgment before your own, I hope that you will not forget what I have told you, that that *blind obedience*, so much extolled by spiritual writers, refers only to the interior state of the soul, the dispositions requisite to receive the sacraments with fruit, or those perplexities and fears which frequently torture the conscience of the scrupulous, and which their reason darkened by the clouds of their bewildered imagination, is incapable of appreciating with impartiality, and consequently from which, left to themselves they could never be delivered. But with regard to temporal concerns, he has no sort of jurisdiction over you; nor is he authorized to ask you any question about them, unless by your own declaration in the tribunal of penance, he has the most unequivocal motives to fear, that the imprescriptible rights of justice, morality, or religion may be injured in

the transactions in which you are engaged. You may consult him, if you like, as a gentleman, whose wisdom and experience are known to you; but in this quality, you are not bound in the least to adopt his opinion or follow his advice. Were he willing to interfere in things which have no relation to your spiritual wants, you are authorized not to listen to him, or were he so forgetful of his duties, which is a case so extremely rare, as it would have been perhaps better not to mention it, as to endeavour to insinuate to you any maxim or doctrine contrary to the Gospel or to the discipline of the Church, you are not only allowed, but even strictly commanded to disobey him, and act according to the dictates of your conscience.

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## XXIV.

### COMMUNION.

The holy fathers call the holy Eucharist a daily bread. In the first ages of Christianity the faithful *persevered*, with simplicity and joy, "in the communication of the breaking of bread and prayers."—Acts ii. 42. In vain, says St. Chrysostome, do we celebrate the tremendous mysteries, if no one participates in them. Our unworthiness alone should exclude us from the *communication* of this daily bread. Unless the faithful should be guilty of grievous sins, they ought not to deprive themselves of the *daily* remedy of the body of our Lord. (St. Austin.) The holy council of Trent declares, that "it were to be wished, that the faithful who assist at each Mass, should communicate in it, not only in spirit and desire, but also by the sacramental reception of the blessed Eucharist, in order to derive more abundant fruit from

this holy sacrifice." Such is the doctrine of the Catholic Church, which is always the same. The purity and holiness of her rules and injunctions, never degenerate, nor are altered. The same divine spirit which animated her, and dictated her decisions in the apostolic times, in the ages of St. Justin, St. Cyprian, St. Chrysostome, St. Jerome, St. Austin, &c. &c., dictates the instructions which, in our days, she gives to her children. Therefore all our endeavours should tend to render us worthy to receive, as often as it will be in our power, this life-giving bread. "To receive the communion of the blessed Eucharist every day, I neither commend nor discommend ; but to communicate every Lord's day, I persuade and exhort every one, provided his soul be without affection to sin. These are the very words of St. Austin, without whom I neither blame nor absolutely praise the communicating every day ; but leave that to the discretion of the ghostly father of him that would be resolved upon this point. For, as the disposition required for such communication ought to be very exquisite, it is not good to advise generally to all ; and as this disposition, how perfect soever, may be found in many holy souls, it is not good either to divert or dissuade, generally, all persons from it ; but this should be regulated by the consideration of the inward state of every one in particular."—St. Fran. of Sales, *Intr.* By this excellent rule of St. Francis of Sales, I exhort you to be guided respecting your communions. I shall only advise you, if your confessor approve of it, to communicate at least, every indulgence, all the feasts of obligation or devotion, the anniversary day of your birth, conversion, and first communion, and besides in those particular circumstances in which you may feel a greater need than usual of spiritual light and assistance. For more frequent communions I refer you to your confessor, who is the only competent judge of your actual

dispositions, and of what you can do with propriety and profit in the situation in which you may be placed. For, as the same St. Francis of Sales justly remarks, "Many lawful impediments may befall you, not on your own part, but on the part of them with whom you live, which may give an occasion to a discreet guide to advise you not to communicate so often. As, for example, if you live in any kind of subjection, and those to whom you owe obedience or respect are still so ill instructed or so humorsome that they are troubled or disquieted to see you communicate so often. Perhaps, all things considered, it would be good to condescend to these people's infirmity, and communicate but once a fortnight; but, this is to be understood, when you can by no means overcome the difficulty. It is hard to give a general rule in this case; we must do what our ghostly father shall advise; though I may, with assurance, say, that the greatest distance between the times of communicating, for such as desire to serve God devoutly, is from month to month."—Introduct. to a Dev. Life. Be persuaded, that if, on your communion-days, you neglect none of your domestic or social duties; if on those days you show yourself to every one more sweet, patient, affable, cheerful, condescending, than at other times; if your countenance, your looks, and words breathe nothing but benevolence, charity, forbearance, desire of obliging, neither your husband, children, servants, friends, and acquaintances will find fault with your frequent communions. Moreover, it is an incontrovertible truth, that being, by our vocation to Christianity, called to live an irreproachable life, we should all, without exception, live with such sanctity as to be worthy, as far as human frailty is susceptible of it, to communicate every day, if not actually, at least spiritually, by the desires of a heart penetrated with gratitude



and love towards our most merciful Saviour. *Sic vive, ut quotidie mercaris accipere.* (St. Austin.)

On the eve of your communion, prepare yourself for this important action by some particular good works, longer prayers, more abundant alms than usual, greater vigilance over all your thoughts, words, and actions, in order to avoid whatever might have the least tendency to defile the purity of your soul, or occasion the wanderings of the imagination. Oh! had we been favoured but once with the sight of the corporal presence of Jesus Christ;—were this adorable Saviour to be pleased to tear off the veils under which he hides himself,—were he to destroy the Eucharist elements, and show himself in the full effulgence of his glory on our altars, as he did to the three apostles at his transfiguration,—penetrated with gratitude, struck with awe, we should fall prostrate on the ground, confounded, annihilated by the consciousness of our unworthiness and miseries, and witnessing at the same time such evident proof of that infinite mercy and unspeakable love in our regard, which have induced him to give himself to us under the appearance of bread, in order to be the daily food of our souls and to dwell with us in this land of temptations and trials; it would be impossible for us to think of any thing else. The hope of seeing him again would fill up our hearts with inexpressible joy, the permission of approaching his divine person, and receiving him in our souls, would transport us with ecstasy, and absorb all our thoughts and affections. We should, with a holy impatience and eagerness, reckon all the hours, moments, and minutes, in the expectation of enjoying a felicity so much above our merits and conceptions. Become quite strangers to all the objects most proper to cause distractions, excite the imagination, and revive natural feelings, we could think of nothing, wish for nothing, and speak of nothing

but Jesus Christ. Yes, if our faith were similar to that of the saints, such would be our feelings whenever we intend to receive the sacrament of the blessed Eucharist.

I own that in the state of degradation into which we are fallen, we shall be but very seldom delivered from the tyrannical dominion which exterior objects exercise over our souls. I know but too well that spiritual things make too often a weak and transient impression upon the senses. But this melancholy experience of our extreme weakness, shows the indispensable necessity, when we dispose ourselves for communion, to avoid with the greatest care whatever might dissipate our thoughts ; exert ourselves with a courageous perseverance to captivate our senses, occupy our minds with pious reflections, raise our hearts to God with fervent aspirations, often repeating the words of the royal prophet : “ As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth after thee, O God. . . . When shall I come and appear before the face of God.”—Ps. c. 2. “ My heart is ready, my heart is ready. Come, Lord Jesus, come.”—Ap. ii. 23.

1. An indispensable disposition to make a good communion, is purity of heart. Our divine Saviour washed the feet of his apostles before the last supper, an humble function which he was pleased to perform himself, in order to make them understand that they should be purified by him before they presumed to receive the heavenly food which he was going to give them. The man who came to the marriage feast without the wedding garment, was not only driven away from the banquet, but besides loaded with chains, “ and cast into exterior darkness ; where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” A lively emblem of the great purity and pious sentiments with which those who accept the invi-

tation, and dare sit among the guests, ought to be animated. "Let a man prove himself; and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord."—1 Cor. xi. 28, 29.

From these quotations of the Holy Scriptures, some might perhaps infer, that it is safer to stay away from the holy communion, than to be exposed to approach it unworthily. But this would be a wrong conclusion. It is true that the man who had not the wedding garment, was cast into exterior darkness, and condemned to eternal woes. But those who, under various pretences, would not come to the marriage were put to death, as the Gospel relates; and the king whose goodness they had contemned, declared that they should never have the least part in the delights which he had prepared for his friends. It is true, that if we eat unworthily, we *shall eat judgment to ourselves*; but it is equally true, that, "except we eat the flesh of the Son of man, we shall not have life in us."—John vi. 54. By communicating unworthily, we take a deadly poison, by abstaining from communion, we starve ourselves to death. If we sit at the sacred table without purity, we are guilty of an inexcusable and highly sinful rashness; if we stay away from it, we commit a criminal disobedience. If we do not take the necessary means to be cleansed from our sins, or if we preserve some affection for any of them, we profane the sacrament; and if without solid reasons we decline to communicate, we are irretrievably lost. What have we then to do, but to live in such purity and innocence, as to be disposed, through the application of his divine and purifying grace, to receive without fear the God who is purity itself? For there is no alternative,

we must live of Jesus Christ, and with Jesus Christ, or die a spiritual death.

2. A profound humility is also an essential disposition for a worthy communion. Indeed, if we reflect on the awful majesty of the guest whom we prepare ourselves to receive, and our manifold miseries and sins, struck as the centurion of the Gospel was at the consciousness of our unworthiness, we shall cry out with him, "O Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof." How then, O Lord, dost thou vouchsafe to humble thyself so low as to come to me? "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?"—Ps. viii. 5. "Is not my substance as nothing before thee?"—Ps. xxxviii. 6. Would to God that I had only my nothingness against me! But besides, I am a sinner, and thou art the Holy of Holies; I have, therefore, stronger motives than thy apostle, "to fall down at thy knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinner, O Lord."—Luke v. 8. I feel and confess my unworthiness; but at the same time, I acknowledge and praise thy infinite goodness, and offer to thee my most humble and heartfelt thanksgivings for thy unspeakable charity. It is not on account of my merits that thou art pleased to come to me. Thou knowest me much better than I do myself, and thou canst discover in me nothing which could entitle me to such a high and ineffable favour. It is only to display the truly incomprehensible extent of thy mercy and love, for the works of thy hands. Yes, O Lord, "I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."—Matt. viii. 8.

3. If humility be sincere, it is always attended with submission and confidence. Jesus Christ wishes to wash

the feet of St. Peter. To the humility of his divine Master the apostle opposes his nothingness and sins : he cannot give his consent to such a prodigious instance of self-abasement and kindness ; but after he had heard these astonishing words : “ If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me, he cried out, Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.” Let us remember that it is Jesus Christ himself who invites us to his banquet ; nay, that he threatens us with his wrath if we decline his kind invitation. Ought we not, therefore, to rely much more on his goodness and indulgence than out of the fear of his justice to remain always at a distance from him ? “ It is not a poison which he offers to you, but a life-giving bread,” says St. Austin. If you fear because you are nothing, and unworthy, have confidence because he possesses all, and is willing gratuitously to give you all. Trusting on his infallible promises, repeat with the royal prophet, “ Receive me, O Lord, according to thy word, and I shall live, and let me not be confounded in my expectation.”—Ps. cxviii. 116. Tell him with the humble St. Austin, “ The house of my soul is narrow ; O ! let it be enlarged by thee, that I may receive thee. It is very ruinous, be thou pleased to repair it. There are within it many things which will be displeasing to thee, I acknowledge and confess ; but who will cleanse and purify it but thee ? To whom shall I cry out besides to thee, ‘ from my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord ? ’ ”

4. When we prepare ourselves for communion, we should represent to our minds that unspeakable love which prompted Jesus Christ to shed his most precious blood, and die upon a cross, to reconcile us with his heavenly father. St. Basil considers the remembrance of the sufferings of our Lord as one of the chief dispositions to communicate worthily. “ As often as you shall eat this

bread, and drink this chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until he come.”—1 Cor. xi. 26. But let us seriously reflect that this remembrance must be accompanied with a return of the most lively gratitude and ardent love. We must try to penetrate into that incomprehensible and unfathomable abyss of our divine Saviour’s *charity* towards us, which “surpasseth all understanding.”—Eph. iii. 18. Moreover this remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ, recalled to our mind when we approach the holy communion, ought to induce us more powerfully than any other motive to live henceforward for him alone. “For the charity of Christ presseth us: judging this, that if one died for all, then all were dead; and Christ died for all: that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.”—2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

When thou givest thy flesh, thy blood, thy soul, thy divinity, thy whole self to us, is it not right, O my most sweet Jesus—is it not indispensable that I should consecrate myself entirely to thee? Is there any need of a special order of thine to induce me to love thee? Does not reason alone command me to love thee with my whole heart, my whole mind, my whole soul, my whole strength, and above all things, and according to thy precept, my neighbour as myself, and for thy sake? But this holy and necessary love I can obtain from thee alone. Help me, then, O Lord, to fulfil, as I ought, this sacred duty. Draw my heart towards thee “with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love.”—Hos. xi. 4. Animate it with the most humble, pious, and grateful sentiments. Deliver me from the shameful lethargy in which I have been so long languishing. Break off the fetters which have tied me up to creatures. Make me feel the emptiness of all human comforts; set me at liberty, that I may take my flight to heaven and rest in

thee. No creature now will be capable of gratifying the desires of my heart, for to a loving soul, all is vanity and affliction of spirit besides loving and serving thee alone.

If you communicate during Mass, or immediately after, the assistance at this holy sacrifice, and your uniting yourself to the intentions of the priest, may serve as an immediate preparation. But were you to communicate before, you should dedicate about twenty minutes to dispose your heart, reading with great attention the preparatory prayers for communion contained in some pious books of your choice; or making acts of contrition, faith, hope, charity, adoration, humility, composed by yourself, or such as you find in the fourth book of the *Imitation of Christ*. After your communion, you should employ the same space of time to offer to God your thanksgivings for the precious gift which he has just bestowed upon you. I need not tell you that the expression of your gratitude should not be confined to those short exercises of piety. Unless you be really hindered, be ingenious to steal away without affectation several moments in the course of the day, to meditate on the unspeakable happiness which you have enjoyed in the morning. Entertain yourself with the beloved of your heart, conjuring him to inspire you with sentiments worthy of him. "Let my soul magnify the Lord, because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid, and hath done great things in me. I possess him that my heart loveth, I lay hold of him, nor will I let him go." It is thus that the Blessed Virgin, and the spouse of the Canticles, poured forth the transports of joy, gratitude, and love that animated them. Believe and love like them, and you will not want either long discourses, or pathetic set form of prayers, to excite in you pious feelings; your heart will speak, Jesus Christ will hear its lan-

guage, though it may consist only in broken words, sighs, and affections.

If, on the day you intend to communicate, your imagination were so prepossessed, or were you to feel such inward trouble, that you could not without violent exertions be recollected, it would be better to deprive yourself from communion on that day out of respect for the sacrament, and be satisfied with a spiritual communion. In such a case you may postpone the sacramental communion to the next day, provided your mind should be free from anxieties, and your conscience without reproach. For if the prepossession of the mind, and inward trouble remained, or had you committed in the mean while some fault which you should think to require absolution, you must stay away from communion till you have consulted your confessor. After having laid with simplicity before him the state of your soul, and acquainted him with your doubts or fears, to his judgment and decision you must submit. By faithfully adhering to this rule, you will not be exposed to the danger of being led astray by scrupulosity or the illusions of self-love. Thus by nourishing frequently your soul with that heavenly food, you will obtain that strength and resolution necessary to make you walk with courage and perseverance in that narrow path that leads "to the mount of God."—3 Kings xix. 8.

The holy dispositions of the pious communicant ought not to cease at the end of the day of his communion, they must be permanent; his subsequent conduct must be conformable to them. It is by his steady and faithful keeping of the commandments of God, and the accomplishment of the obligations of his state of life, that he will testify to his sovereign Benefactor, his lively gratitude for the inestimable gift which he has bestowed upon him. Thus by his daily endeavours to advance in



virtue, he prepares himself to welcome with a holy joy that last visit of our Lord and most merciful Saviour, that will consummate the work of his sanctification, and secure to him a happy passage from time to eternity.

When you are duly prepared, and have received your confessor's decision, or leave, present yourself with an humble confidence to the sacred banquet; go in the name of him who will be your peace, and reward your obedience to his minister; you have then every reason to hope that you are one of the guests invited by the Almighty, and through the application of the merits of Jesus Christ, clothed with the wedding garment. Believe me, you will always suffer a great loss whenever you deprive yourself of this life-giving food, for slight imperfections, or venial transgressions, to which you never give a wilful and deliberate consent, or which are, I am fully persuaded, as soon retracted as perceived. Indeed, we must be exempt not only from mortal sin, but even from affection to venial sin, in order to be admitted to frequent communion; but a total exemption from all defects and frailties is not requisite. Were we to put off our communions till we should have attained perfection, we should be inevitably exposed to be deprived for ever of the blessed Eucharist, and never attain perfection; for it is by frequent communion, received with proper dispositions, that we become perfect, as far as it is possible to be in this life. "It has pleased Almighty God," says St. Austin, "that we should be reduced to the necessity of living with humility under the yoke of the daily confession of our sins." St. John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us." Yet this holy and learned doctor of the Church recommends frequent communion.

We ought not to be surprised to see pious Christians frequently communicating, and yet guilty of venial sins. We must not be shocked at the sight of the imperfections in which the Almighty leaves them, in order to entertain in their hearts a spirit of humility and self-abasement, but fix our eyes on the number of more dangerous and grievous faults from which that heavenly food preserves them. The pious souls who in the whole tenour of their conduct act with simplicity and candour—who are humble and docile, who sincerely bewail their daily weaknesses, and are ready to undertake all that may be conducive to their correction—ought to be encouraged to frequent communion. Their involuntary failings, instead of being a sufficient reason to exclude them from it, show on the contrary, the great want in which they are to nourish their souls with that bread that is called, by way of eminence, “the bread of the strong.” He must eat the bread come down from heaven, who wishes to live a heavenly life. The blessed Eucharist is the bread that makes the little ones grow, fortifies the weak, heals the wounds of the heart, and gives health and vigour to the soul, when received with proper dispositions. Love is the best preparation for the sacrament of love. When you are to participate in the holy and tremendous mysteries, it is right to consider yourself as a poor leper covered all over with sores. But let that consciousness of your unworthiness, make you cry out to God with a filial confidence, “O Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me whole;” and he will accomplish all your desires. In short, let love put away fear: fear is the sentiment of slaves; confidence and love, the happy and habitual disposition of children. Love, therefore, and you will enjoy with safety the communications of Him who calls himself “the lover of souls,”

and who came down from heaven "to send the fire" of divine love on the earth, and whose most ardent wish "and will is, that it be kindled."

"For frequent communion, to require of souls solidly pious and enlightened on their respective duties, that they should have attained the highest degree of Christian perfection; to deprive them of this life-giving food on account of those frailties, of which the just themselves cannot always be exempt; to point out to them as indispensable, such a line of perfection as if not wholly impossible in practice, is at least extremely rare, and surrounded with almost insuperable difficulties; to keep them in a perpetual fasting till they have arrived at that perfection, and to make them consider as a virtue and merit before God, a privation which increases their weakness, and leaves them without defence against the enemy of our salvation, is a doctrine which I do not approve, nor shall ever approve," says Bourdaloue. "I shall," says he, "exhort such pious souls to tend with an indefatigable zeal and ardour towards that high perfection, to propose to themselves that high perfection as the end of all their wishes and endeavours, and try every day with fresh resolution to attain that high perfection; but if they be still at some distance from it; if they have not entirely completed that evangelical tower which they have begun to build; if, like the prophet Elias, they have 'yet a great way to go' till they could reach the summit of mount Horeb; I shall not treat them with the same severity with which was treated the guest who was expelled from the marriage feast, because he had rashly presented himself without the wedding garment. But adopting quite a different rule, I should tell them what the angel said to Elias: 'Arise and eat, for thou hast yet a great way to go.'—3 Kings xix. 7. Come with confidence, take and eat this bread that is offered to you

and will help you in the career which you have begun to run. For I shall always remember that it is not for the strong and the just that Jesus Christ is come, but for the weak and the sinner; that it is not for the sacraments that God has created men; but that it is for men that he has instituted the sacraments; that men being always men, how perfect soever they may be imagined, yet they are not angels, and of course that they will never be without imperfections, and if we were to expect that they should be wholly delivered from them, or till they had accomplished all that an exaggerated severity requires of them the benefit of the holy communion could not be granted to them, scarcely the apostles themselves, the first Christians, the greatest saints, could have ever been admitted to the sacred banquet. Such are the general rules. I say *general*, because I know that there are particular rules for some individuals, some conditions of life and circumstances, the judgment of which belongs to the pastors of the church and directors of souls."

The benefits which we reap from communion are not to be esteemed from sensibility of devotion or tender feelings, but from our abhorrence of sin, fidelity in keeping the commandments of God and the duties of our state of life, firm resolution to accomplish the will of God in all things, a love of him in preference to all created beings, and those dispositions of heart so beautifully expressed in these words of the royal prophet: "My soul has coveted to long for thy justification at all times." Neglect nothing to entertain in you these holy dispositions. When you feel that nature is beginning to resume her dominion over you, resist the first attempt; stand firm trusting in the help of God, and the enemy, covered with shame, will depart from you and leave you in peace.

It is a very ancient practice in the Catholic Church, ordained by many councils to preserve the blessed Eucharist in our tabernacles, that at all times it might be carried to the sick ; and the holy council of Trent has decreed, that this necessary and so profitable a custom should be maintained with the greatest exactness. Under the new covenant, when the children of the Catholic Church are at the moment of encountering for the last time the enemy of our salvation, the Lord God of Hosts comes to the field of battle, in order to fortify those whom "he is not ashamed to call his brethren."—Heb. ii. 11. He incorporates himself with them, in order to enable them to say in a stricter sense than the prophet, "The Lord is with me as a strong warrior; therefore they that persecute me shall fall, and shall be weak, and shall be greatly confounded."—Jer. xx. 11. How sweet and salutary is that last visit of the Lord, to those who, having been reconciled with God by the application of the infinite merits of the passion, which our Saviour suffered in his mortal body, to render them "holy, unspotted, and blameless before him, have continued in the faith, grounded and settled, and immovable from the hope of the Gospel," yet are still in need of the strongest grace, to persevere faithful to the end.—Col. i. 22, 23.

The God-man who comes to visit the faithful on the bed of sickness, gives them that living water which he mentioned to the Samaritan woman, that water "of which he who shall drink, shall not thirst for ever, but shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.—John iv. 10, 14, 15. The minister of the church, entering the room of the sick, says in the name of the merciful God whom he holds in his hands, "Peace be to this house." He whom we behold laid upon the bed of sickness, is a son of peace, and the peace of the

Saviour shall rest upon him; 'for the God who has vouchsafed to visit him, has towards him only "thoughts of peace and not of affliction." He will give him that peace that he granted and left to his apostles, so different from that treacherous peace which the world pretends to give to his favourites; but that precious peace of God which surpasseth all understanding, and which is a pledge, and affords a foretaste of eternal peace.

Oh! if worldlings, and those who are unacquainted with, or opposite to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, could penetrate into the heart, or conceive an idea of the feelings of the pious Catholic at that awful moment; how different would their sentiments be! Instead of the gloom with which they represent to themselves the minister of God to be surrounded, instead of beholding the sick struck with fright and dismay at the sight of the priest; they would admire him, looking at him with a sweet countenance, and eyes sparkling with spiritual joy, as at the meeting of the long expected and wished for visit of a beloved friend. They would see him forgetting all his sufferings, and gathering up all his remaining strength to offer up to his most gracious Lord the homage of his adoration, gratitude, and love. Could they penetrate into his soul, they would hear him saying, "O Lord God of heaven and earth, the King of ages, immortal, invisible, who inhabitest light inaccessible; thou in whose name every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth."—Philip. ii. 10. Sweet Jesus, thou vouchsafest to enter under my wretched roof now that my infirmities and exhausted strength prevent me from going to thy temple and prostrate myself before thy sacred altars, to implore thy mercy. What then shall I return to thee for such an ineffable condescension and goodness? Were it not for them, who could supply my wants, and afford

me help and comfort? "I acknowledge thy bounty, I praise thy goodness, I give thanks for thy excessive charity; for it is of thy own mercy that thou dost this, not for my merits, that thy goodness may be better known to me."—Im. of Christ.

This admirable proof of our most bountiful Redeemer's charity towards him, inspires the sick man with a comfort and confidence which only those who have felt them can express, though always in very inadequate terms. Indeed, he is in the midst of the shadow of death, but the eternal lover of his soul, his Saviour, is with him, "The Lord is his light and salvation, he can fear no evils."—Ps. xxii. 4. If the last hour is come, he is prepared for it. The divine grace which replenishes his heart, has disposed him to offer to his Creator a willing sacrifice of his life. He leaves his body in his hands, trusting that if "it returns into the earth from whence it was" (Eccl. xii. 7), his soul will be admitted into the place of refreshment and peace, where his ardent desire of dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, and his hopes of seeing the good things and delights of the Lord, will be fully gratified. Respecting his body, the destruction of which he feels fast approaching, he is free from anxiety, he knows that "his Redeemer liveth, and in the last day he shall rise out of the earth, and he shall be clothed again with his skin, and in his flesh shall see his God; whom he himself shall see, and his eyes shall behold, and not another."—Job. xix. 25. This his hope is laid up in his bosom, and banishes all fears and regrets: satisfied with these holy dispositions of which he is himself the author, Jesus Christ dispels from his mind all temporal concerns, to make room for the thoughts of a blessed eternity; recalling to his remembrance this so consoling article of our faith, that "if our earthly house of this habitation be

dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven." Thus encouraged, and as it were, spiritualized, he has no longer any other will but "to be absent rather from the body, and to be present with the Lord ; in short, to be dissolved and to be with Christ ; a thing by far the better."—Philip. i. 21.

Oh ! how happy are those who, when they are going to depart from this world, are animated with these pious sentiments, and who dying the death of the just may hope, through the mercy of God, and the application of the superabundant merits of Jesus Christ, to be numbered among his faithful servants, of whom it is written, "Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb ; that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city."—Apoc. xxii. 14.

I most earnestly exhort you to preserve ever unaltered the belief of the manifold blessings which are derived from the participation of the blessed Eucharist. Be constantly faithful to accomplish the sacred obligations which this belief imposes upon us. By your fidelity to them, you "shall come to life." Bewail the blindness and obstinacy of those who reject that unspeakable favour, and necessary assistance in this state of trials and temptations. Alas ! they "shall come to death." Notwithstanding the scandals which you may be witness of, remain immovable in this faith. Walk in the light of its brightness. Let never human motives deter you from complying with the precepts of the Church, and the dictates of your conscience, since you are so happy "as the things which are pleasing to God, have been so clearly made known to you."—Bar. iv.



## XXV.

DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN—INTERCESSION OF  
THE SAINTS.

Put yourself under the protection of the Blessed Virgin; beseech her to adopt you for her child, and intercede for you with her divine Son our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom *alone* you can expect your salvation, and the means of obtaining it; and who alone through his all-powerful grace, and on your side, by your fidelity to keep his divine commandments, and your correspondence with his holy inspirations, can make you persevere and increase every day in virtue and merits before God and men. But as the devotion of Catholics towards the Blessed Virgin, and their confidence in her intercession and that of the saints, is very ill-understood and much misrepresented by Protestants; I shall lay before you some reflections, which I hope, will confirm you in your sentiments with regard to that devotion, and enable you to "satisfy every one that asketh you a reason of that hope that is in you."—1 Peter iii. 15.

We adore but one God, the creator, preserver, and dispenser of all things, in whose name we have been consecrated by the sacrament of baptism. In him alone we acknowledge an Almighty power, absolute sovereignty, infinite goodness, the union of all possible perfections, the *fulness* of being. As we have but one God, we have also but one universal Mediator, Jesus Christ, who has saved us by the effusion of his blood, and it is only through his name, that we can now approach God. It is in this name that we pray for ourselves, and for all the

faithful ; and God who loves charity and concord between brothers, hears us with benevolence. We honour the saints as the friends of God ; in them we admire the miracles of his all-powerful arm, the communication of his grace, the effusion of his glory, and that humble and unreserved dependence upon him, by which they rejoice to have received, and shall eternally receive all that which they are and possess, and to whom alone all our worship is referred, as to the sole principle of all blessings, and the only end to which all our desires and pursuits ought to be directed.

Let us not be afraid to displease God in having recourse to the prayers of his divine Son's mother, and to those of the saints. On the contrary, we honour thereby his sovereign Majesty, by our humble acknowledgment of the great need in which we are to have intercessors with him. St. Paul recommended himself to the prayers of the faithful ; and the apostle St. James exhorts them to pray for one another. But if we are not displeasing Jesus Christ ; if we do nothing injurious to his mediation, by claiming the assistance of the prayers of our brothers, who are still living in a state of trial and probation, uncertain as yet of their future destiny, how could we offend this God Saviour by begging the intercession of the saints whom he has already put into the possession of his kingdom, which was prepared for them from the beginning of the world. We are therefore persuaded that the Blessed Virgin and the saints who are reigning with her in the kingdom of heaven, are very acceptable intercessors for us with the Saviour of mankind ; but never forget that what words soever, or set of words we make use of, we never ask the Blessed Virgin or any of the saints to grant our petitions, but only to pray to, and beseech the supreme Giver of all good gifts to grant them to us.

All the blessed are our friends and brothers; we speak to them with confidence, and though they be invisible to our mortal eyes, by faith we behold them as if they were present, their charity renders them propitious to us, and induces them to unite their prayers to our own, in order to help us to obtain the accomplishment of the desires which piety has inspired us to lay before the throne of God. Secure now of their eternal happiness, they are sincerely solicitous to see us partakers of it. Having passed through this vale of tears, they know by their own experience the dangers to which we are exposed, the snares laid under our feet, the difficulties which we have to struggle against, the obstacles to overcome. Having been, as we are still, clothed with this frail and mortal body, they are well acquainted with the weakness of our nature, and how violent are the assaults which we have daily to encounter against the enemies of our salvation. This experimental knowledge excites their compassion, and urges them to draw down upon us by their prayers the favours, assistance, and mercy of the Lord our God. Thus that illustrious warrior, who fought so gloriously even to death for the defence and preservation of the law of his forefathers, Judas Machabeus, saw in a dream the holy pontiff Oniah, "holding up his hands and praying for all the people of the Jews. After this there appeared also another man admirable for age and glory, and environed with great glory and majesty, whom Onias pointing out to him, said, This is he that prayeth much for the people and for the holy city, Jeremias the prophet of God."—2 Mach. xv. 12, 13, 14.

How merciful and condescending are the ways of the Lord in our regard! What admirable means has he chosen to encourage our timidity, and help our weakness; and how much entitled is he to our gratitude and

love ! We might be terrified and afraid to address ourselves to the Father, "the most high Creator, Almighty, and a powerful King, and greatly to be feared, who sitteth upon his throne, and is the God of dominion ;" whose awful splendour the seraphims cannot support, and at the faint glimmerings of which they are compelled "to cover their face with their wings."—Eccl.; Is. The Father has given us Jesus Christ for Mediator, who is "not ashamed to call us his brethren, being made like unto us, and one tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."—Heb. ii. 11 ; iv. 15. But, perhaps we might still dread in Jesus Christ the divine majesty inseparably united to his human nature. This most merciful Redeemer has given us for our advocate with him his holy mother, a mere creature as we are, and in whom there is no other nature but ours. She is a second mother for us, her maternal heart is open to all our wants, considering us as her children, she intercedes for us, and entreats her divine son to grant to the just an increase of virtue, and the most precious gifts of perseverance, and to the sinner a penitent heart, and the forgiveness of his iniquities. Her prayers will be heard because, as says a holy father, she speaks to the heart of a Son disposed from his love for her, not to refuse her charitable request.

But let us not deceive ourselves, our devotion and confidence in the Blessed Virgin will be of no avail, if we do not strive to imitate her virtues. Our homages can never be acceptable to her, if, by our continuing in a state of sin, we remain hateful in the sight of God. But she will acknowledge us as her children, she will be pleased with our veneration, and will earnestly pray for us, when she will behold us doing our utmost to accomplish the will of her divine Son ; and at the same time there is no doubt that we shall likewise please

him, when he shall see our endeavours to be like the mother whom he has chosen for himself. Let us be thoroughly persuaded that a solid and enlightened devotion towards the Blessed Virgin and the saints must induce us to walk in their footsteps, and after their example be desirous of, and seeking only the permanent and only real good, viz., our eternal salvation by the practice of all Christian virtues, of which during their life they offered us a perfect model. "The solemnities celebrated in the honour of martyrs are," says St. Austin, "an exhortation to martyrdom. The martyrs," continues the same holy father, "are not inclined to pray for us unless they can discover some of their virtues in us, or at least an earnest desire of imitating them." Such is the intention of the Catholic Church in instituting their festivals, which she clearly and most evidently declares in that beautiful prayer (feast of St. Steph.), "Grant, O Lord, that we may imitate him whose memory we celebrate." It is therefore the invariable doctrine of the Catholic Church, which in all her instructions she endeavours to impress deeply on the minds of her children, that the most essential part of the devotion towards the saints, is the imitation of their sanctity. In vain shall we celebrate the memory of the martyrs, if we do not try to imitate their patience and fortitude under the most severe trials. The solemnities of the confessors ought to be an encouragement and spur to animate us with their spirit of mortification and penance. We must be pure of heart, humble and modest, when we honour virgins, and especially the queen of virgins. By this infallible rule it will be easy to distinguish the solid and approved devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the saints, from those vain and false devotions which, to the great injury of real piety, and against the most positive instructions of the Ca-

tholic Church, one may see now and then followed by ignorant people.

It cannot be denied that sometimes from the most ill-grounded notions, there are petitions addressed to the Blessed Virgin which she will never hear nor present to her divine Son, because they are injurious to God, unworthy of the mother of God, and dangerous to ourselves. I say injurious to God, because they are wholly inconsistent and irreconcilable with the order of his divine providence, and tend to destroy the whole economy of our salvation. In effect, according to the principles by which he will have us to be guided in all spiritual exercises and devout practices, we ought to be convinced that our salvation first and chiefly depends upon him, and secondly upon ourselves also ; and consequently he strictly commands us to correspond with his divine grace, and labour most earnestly to obtain it. He allows us, it is true, to have recourse to the Blessed Virgin, in order to be helped and seconded in our pious endeavours. He is so indulgent and condescending as to let us form a confident hope, that he will look down with a propitious eye on her holy intercession in our behalf, and grant us the favour which we solicit and expect only from his infinite mercy ; but it is on condition that we shall render her intercession fruitful by a sincere spirit of penance, an assiduous care, unwearied vigilance to avoid all occasions of sin, and constant perseverance in the practice of good works, and accomplishment of our obligations. Such is the rule ordained by Almighty God ; and from which no devotions can ever dispense us. But there are sometimes though indeed very seldom, people so ignorant or so infatuated as to adopt in practice ideas only congenial to their corrupt inclinations. Because they have placed themselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, practised

some exterior devotions, recited with fidelity some vocal prayers in her honour, and would be uneasy if now and then they were wilfully to omit to say their beads, &c. &c., they foolishly imagine that they have nothing else to do, that they are sheltered from the dangers of the world, the inward temptations with which we are daily assaulted, the possibility of a sudden and untimely death, and the awful judgments of divine justice. Acting under the influence of that erroneous confidence, they expose themselves rashly to the occasions of sin, give way without scrupulosity to ill-humour, vanity, &c., remain quietly in a state of tepidity, and without making any efforts to reform their manners, without exciting themselves to contrition, and doing any penance for their daily transgressions, yet they entertain no doubt that the sole intercession of Mary will obtain their reconciliation with God and secure their eternal happiness. A shocking and criminal illusion of which a Christian, who has not lost the use of his reason could not be thought capable or susceptible; if the most extravagant inconsistencies were not too often the attendants of our weakness and corruption.

We said that there are petitions or prayers which the Blessed Virgin could not present to her divine Son, because they were unworthy of her sanctity; for, if she did, she would thereby authorize the sinner in the infringement of the immutable decrees of Eternal Wisdom, dispel from his mind the just fear of the judgments of God, prevent him from taking the necessary measures to avert them, encourage him in his disorders, and expose him to the most imminent danger of dying in impenitence. It is from these solid reasons that the Catholic Church so strongly enjoins to her ministers to guard the faithful committed to their care against false or exaggerated notions of the efficacy of the intercession of

the Blessed Virgin; because, instead of contributing to their conversion or advancement in virtue, such notions would tend to corrupt their morals, alienate them from God, and be ultimately the cause of their eternal perdition. Let it be therefore engraved in your mind in indelible characters, that without charity and keeping the commandments of God, and fulfilling the duties of our respective condition, we cannot be his friends, nor admitted into his heavenly kingdom. That we can obtain nothing in the order of our salvation but through the mediatorship of our Saviour Jesus Christ. That "we are not sufficient to think any thing as of ourselves but our sufficiency is from God." That we ought not to address ourselves either to our Blessed Lady, or to any saints, as if they had any power of themselves to grant our petitions, all that which they can do in our behalf, being only to pray and intercede for us, that if we derive any benefit from their intercession, we owe that benefit to the application of the infinite merits of our divine Redeemer. "According to the sense of the Council of Trent, to invoke the saints, is to have recourse to their prayers for obtaining benefits from God through Jesus Christ. So that in reality, we do not obtain those benefits which we receive by the intercession of the saints, otherwise than through Jesus Christ, and in his name. Seeing that these saints themselves pray in no other manner than through Jesus Christ, and are not heard but in his name. The Catholic Church permits not her children to consider, even in the greatest saints, any degree of excellency which does not proceed from God; nor any acceptableness in his sight, but by their virtues; nor any virtue which is not a gift of his grace; nor any knowledge of human affairs, but what is communicated to them; nor any power to assist us but by their prayers; nor, in fine, any felicity but by a sub-



mission and a perfect conformity to his divine will.”—Bossuet’s *Exposition of the Doctrine of the Catholic Church*.

The favours which we should chiefly solicit of God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and of the saints are the grace of imitating them, and all the spiritual helps which we stand in need of to secure our eternal salvation. Yet you must not thereby conclude that you are forbidden to implore their assistance and protection in your temporal concerns, since Jesus Christ has taught us to ask our daily bread of his heavenly Father. We read also in the Gospel, that the Blessed Virgin, at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, did not think indiscreet to represent to her divine Son that the wine was failing; which surely she would have never done if such a request could have been in opposition to his dispositions, which she so well knew. We are therefore authorized to apply to her and the saints to obtain through their prayers our daily bread, and by these words we may understand not only the necessities of life, but also the innocent comforts requisite to support our natural weakness. But in presenting such petitions, let us not forget that we are Christians, and are destined to a better life than this short and transitory one; for I desire you to consider in what rank is placed the asking of our daily bread in our Lord’s prayer. It is in the middle of seven petitions, as it has been remarked by a pious and learned divine, all that precedes and follows is entirely spiritual. First, we ask that the “name of God be hallowed, his kingdom come, his will be done.” Then we solicit the forgiveness of our trespasses, his protection against the enemy of our salvation, and deliverance from evil; there is only one single petition respecting our temporal wants which seems almost entirely absorbed by the others which

refer only to imperishable and spiritual concerns. Thus our divine Saviour, as I have already said, whilst he allowed us to have recourse to his unbounded munificence and goodness in our temporal necessities, admonished us at the same time not to let ourselves to be wholly taken up with the care of this mortal body, and the interests of this world, but to be always and chiefly attentive to secure the unperishable enjoyments of the life to come, according to his precept, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice."\*

Unfortunately, it is too often in our temporal wants, or to obtain temporal blessings that we ask the intercession of Mary and the saints; and the excessive earnestness of our prayers to them on that regard, increases our attachment for the goods of this world. Hence it happens that, after having laid our requests before them, we are no more resigned to the will of God than we were before; but even sometimes more eager and ardent in our desires, and more agitated with anxieties and fears. This is so very true that, when we are thwarted in our designs or disappointed in our expectations, we do not confine ourselves to utter those respectful complaints which an afflicted and submissive heart lays down at the feet of its Redeemer, to expire there in humble and pious conformity to his will, but indulge grumblings and murmurings against the decrees of his all-wise and merciful providence. Let us, therefore, address ourselves with confidence to the Blessed Virgin and the saints in our temporal as well as in our spiritual interests. The history of the Church furnishes many instances of the efficacy of their intercession on occasions, in which all human hopes of relief, redress, or safety, were entirely lost. But let us do it in a Christian manner; that is to say, with a per-

\* These observations are taken from Bossuet's Sermons.

fect and unreserved resignation to the will of God, whatsoever things he may be pleased to permit or ordain ; “ for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings—and we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good.”—Rom. viii. 26, 28.

Virtuous people are, without doubt, much more entitled to the protection of the Blessed Virgin and of the saints, than those who are still leading a vicious life. Yet it would be depriving sinners of a very solid and efficacious resource in their melancholy state, to make them believe that if they have not actually abandoned their sinful ways, broken off their criminal connexions, and are not animated with a perfect contrition for their transgressions, it is in vain for them to place any confidence in the compassion of the mother of God, and to implore her assistance. For, although they be not yet truly penitent, they may become so through her intercession, and obtain the grace of a contrite heart. Although they may not, as yet, have the courage of resisting their corrupt inclinations, they may ask it of God, and obtain it from him by the efficacy of her prayers united to their own. Although they may be not, as yet, penetrated with the fear of the divine judgments as they ought, they can, through her intercession, receive from her divine Son the grace which will enlighten their darkness, move them to repentance, and fortify their still weak and tottering resolutions. From the abyss into which they are fallen, and where they are on the point of perishing, they can lift up their hands towards her, crying out in the anguish of their heart, ‘ O thou queen of angels and men, refuge of sinners, comfort of the afflicted ! do not forsake me in the dreadful state in which I am lingering in despair. To my great shame and imminent danger, I confess it,

I am a sinner, blind, weak, obdurate, sinking under the weight of my iniquities, and incapable with my sole strength to rise again, and be restored to life. I do not deserve thy protection, I acknowledge ; but thou art the mother of him “who did not come to call the just, but sinners.”—Matt. ix. 13. And thou art also my mother ; look down therefore with pity upon thy child, vouchsafe to be my advocate and intercede for me with my Judge, conjure him to restore to me the grace which I have lost, and without which I cannot return to him. “Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.” If sinners implore her assistance in this or a similar manner, can we reasonably believe, that she will turn a deaf ear to their humble and earnest supplications, and refuse to employ in their behalf her powerful intercession with her divine Son ? Oh no ! Although she is raised to the highest degree of perfection and grandeur which it is possible for a mere creature to attain, and enjoys delights which are far beyond human abilities to describe, she is still the mother of mercies and the refuge of sinners ; she rejects and contemns no one. As soon as they implore her intervention with a sincere desire of emerging from the depths of their miseries and crimes, and of being converted to God, she stretches forth to them her maternal hand to draw them out from the abyss in which they might, if it had not been for her timely assistance, have remained lost for ever. Through the efficacy of her prayers, God is appeased ; he lets a ray of hope reanimate their hearts, and she never ceases to solicit new graces in their favour, till she obtains their perfect reconciliation with him. What we have just said respecting the precious effects and the conditions of the devotion towards our Blessed Lady, ought to be applied in a subordinate manner to our devotion to and our confidence in the intercession of the saints.

## XXVI.

## OF THE CORRECTION OF OUR DEFECTS.

Our fidelity in the service of God should never abate, nay it ought to increase in proportion as we advance in years. But that we shall never fall into some faults, cannot be expected from the weakness and frailty inherent to our nature. Alas ! as long as we shall be clothed with this mortal body, we shall have but too often occasion to say, " O Lord, forgive us our tresspasses." However we ought not to be surprised nor disheartened at this melancholy experience. Provided you have not retracted your resolution to correct your defects, and are continually endeavouring to get rid of them, accidental failings or relapses are not a proof that these resolutions were not sincere ; but it shows only that you cannot rely upon yourself, and that every day you want new grace to repair your daily spiritual losses, and persevere in the practice of virtue. Those who begin to serve God are in great need of patience with themselves. For in the first fervour of a conversion, they are apt to trust too much upon their actual feelings, and indulge a thought that they will last for ever. In the ardour of their devotion, they might be tempted to say with David, " In my abundance I said, I shall never be moved ;" but soon they will be compelled to add with the same prophet, " Thou turnedst away thy face from me, and I became troubled."—Ps. xxix. 7. This last feeling in the designs of a most merciful God, is a new favour conferred upon them. In effect, the defects to which pious souls are still liable, bring them to a deeper sense of their weakness, and are a more effectual preservative against pride and self-complacency than the most solid arguments.

In order to attain to perfection, you must bear your imperfections with patience. I say *bear your imperfections*; but do not cherish them, or remain indifferent about their correction: two very different things which scrupulous souls are apt to confound together. You must see yourself such as you are without flattery, but also without exaggerating your defects, or despondency at their sight. Do not wonder that you cannot be delivered all at once from human miseries, thoughts of vanity, self-seeking, accidental emotions of vivacity, ill-humour, &c. What else can we expect from self-love, so deeply rooted in our nature, but extravagances and failings? It is out of our power to prevent a first emotion, *motus primo primus*: the essential is to stop the second; otherwise the third will be stronger. A passion which could easily be overcome at its first rising grows, by indulging it, so powerful as to be at length quite irresistible. In the faults which we commit we must be careful not to be influenced by vanity, for we often do not correct ourselves from human respect, and in order to avoid the humiliation of acknowledging that we have been really in the wrong. Yield with gratitude to the Spirit of God, who inwardly reproaches you with your infidelities, and do your utmost to atone for them; but do not pine away in melancholy reflections upon your frailty. Remember that a hearty sorrow for sins committed, and firm purpose of amendment, must always be attended with courage, and an unbounded confidence in the goodness and mercy of God. In the bitter grief which sometimes pious souls feel at the sight of their manifold defects, and in the lively and exaggerated description which they make of them, there may be some secret self-love lurking at the bottom of their hearts; for an humble contrition is always exempt from desponding thoughts and expressions. If your con-

science reproach you with a real fault, condemn yourself inwardly, as soon as you are sensible of it, and when alone, fall upon your knees, penetrated with sentiments of humility and sorrow, saying, O Lord, I am extremely sorry for having again offended thee; I accept the humiliation which my sin so justly causes to me; I firmly resolve, with the assistance of thy grace, to make amends, and hope, through thy infinite mercy, that thou wilt forgive me. But I conjure and beseech thee do not abandon me to myself: this new experiment which I have just made of my extreme weakness and frailty, teaches me more than ever, that without thy help I shall always be the same.

When you cannot clearly discern whether you have exactly fulfilled some of your duties, nor form a positive judgment of the nature of the fault which you think to have been guilty of—after a serious, but moderate and calm examination of your conscience, and of the circumstances in which you have been placed, if you be still perplexed with doubts, humble yourself before Almighty God, asking him to enlighten your darkness, and begging his pardon for all that you may have done wrong in his sight, and which you cannot discover: then endeavour to forget all those doubts, till you prepare yourself for your next confession. But supposing you should be conscious to have committed a grievous fault it would be advisable to have recourse to the sacrament of penance before the usual time. Then resume your habitual occupations, without losing most precious time in an endless and noxious examination of thoughts, feelings, or secret motives of your actions, of which you have no clear remembrance, or can give no distinct account. No sadness, no dejection of mind, no bitterness against yourself: all this is of no use, and cannot please our Lord. What benefit shall I derive by giving

way to anxieties and troubles? This is a question which you should often ask yourself. Dwell much more on the unspeakable mercies of God than on your miseries; invoke him through Jesus Christ. Above all things entertain your mind with the considerations which are the most proper to excite and increase his divine love to you. "Apply yourself," says Bossuet, "rather to please God, than to know whether you are pleasing to him: thus your conduct will be attended with simplicity, guided by wisdom, and supported by confidence."

One of the chief causes of your anxieties comes from your unwillingness to acknowledge, that there are still in you humbling dispositions. But believe me, as long as you indulge that delicacy of self-love, were you to hide yourself in a desert in order to enjoy peace you would never find it, because you would carry every where that over-delicate self-love, and every where it would be an inexhaustible source of troubles; you would besides feel bitter reproaches of conscience for having disobeyed God, and in order to gratify your pride left the situation in which you had been placed by his divine providence; for, as the Scripture says, "who hath resisted God, and hath had peace?"—Job. ix. 4. Bear with patience—I cannot too strongly urge it upon you—the sight of all your inward miseries, and even as you say, the deformity which you perceive in your soul. "We must bear," says St. Austin, "the yoke of the daily confusion of our sins." It is very advantageous for us to be well aware of the great and almost insuperable difficulty to correct our defects, were we to have no other resource than our weak reason and debilitated strength. On our side let us leave nothing undone to bring about a perfect reformation of our manners; but though always conscious of our incapa-



city to succeed in such an undertaking, let us remain in peace till God is pleased to operate it in us. Let us abandon all our imperfections to the Spirit of God: he will consume them as fire does straw; but before he delivers us from them he will employ them to rescue us from the tyrannical dominion of self-love and pride. The persons who are guided by the principles of an enlightened piety, and consequently have for themselves no other sentiments but those which charity commands them to have for their neighbour, would bear with their own imperfections as they would do with his. They well know all that which is to be reformed and corrected in their inclinations and actions, and they most sincerely and actively exert themselves to succeed; but with that discretion and patience which they would use towards a friend whom they are earnestly desirous to encourage and guide with safety in the service of God. They persevere in their endeavours; but they do not lay upon themselves a burden heavier than they can bear in their actual circumstances, nor do they give way to low spirits and despondency because they cannot in one day gain a complete victory over their passions.

In order to prepare our hearts to receive the impressions of grace, and be enabled to put in practice the precepts of the Gospel, we must be careful and persevering to root out our repugnances and corrupt propensities. But this necessary and pious work ought to be undertaken and pursued with steadiness, patience, and moderation. We must endeavour to lay aside long and deep reasonings, and do with simplicity all that we can. When your actions are good in themselves, reject all reflections on the motives which may unawares have induced you in some degree to perform them, unless you have a clear and distinct consciousness that you have been influenced by self-love. Otherwise there will be

no end to your examinations, you will incessantly be tormented by doubts and anxieties, and lose the time of acting. Piety is not an austere and melancholy aggregation of restrictions and perplexing duties: it consists in the love of God. If this sentiment predominate in your heart, you will enjoy peace, liberty, and comfort; but if you serve him from servile fear, you will never feel the sweetness of his presence, and always be tormented with troubles and anxious cares. If we be not upon our guard, our whole life will pass uselessly away in reasonings and disquisitions about what is most perfect, and we shall want another to reduce all our fine projects and resolutions to practice. Let us be persuaded that those sublime speculations are generally a great illusion: instead of helping us to die to ourselves, they secretly entertain in us the life of the old man, by a blind confidence in our views and personal abilities.

The work of our sanctification is not the work of a day, it is the work of our whole life. We grow up and die by little and little, and, as it were, by inches. It is thus we should labour, without intermission, to correct our defects and imperfections. We must every day ask pardon for our daily offences, and every day endeavour to avoid relapsing into them. Every day we ought to strive to do all the good in our power, and the next day begin again, as if we had done nothing before: in short, as we did on the first day of our conversion. Nothing is more effectual to draw down upon us the grace of God than such an humble and patient courage: "for power is made in infirmity."—2 Cor. xii. 8. Thus, our progress in virtue, though apparently slow, yet will be rapid. If every year, says the *Following of Christ*, we rooted out one vice, we should soon become perfect. Respecting the acquiring the perfection of a Christian life, the important thing is, not to walk fast, but well and

steadily. Had you commanded one of your servants to undertake a journey, and were he to be always seeking how he could accomplish your orders with the greatest speed, you would, without doubt, tell him, Do not take so much trouble, follow the road which I have pointed out to you ; provided you do not retrace your steps, or stop, you will walk fast enough and reach the end of your journey by the time which I have fixed. This is precisely what God tells you, and will have you to do ; for, to attain to the highest perfection, we must have no other will but to conform ourselves to his. Occupy yourself to lay deeply the foundation of the edifice, by an unfeigned and universal abnegation of yourself, and unreserved submission to the designs of his divine providence over you ; then he will raise upon that foundation the edifice which he likes, and which always will be the most conducive to his greater glory and your own sanctification.

To flatter ourselves that we shall be able, all at once, to subdue *all* our propensities, and mend *all* that is to be mended in us, betrays a great ignorance of human weakness, or a great presumption. Oh ! happy imperfections, says St. Francis of Sales, which compel us to acknowledge our nothingness and infirmities, exercise us in the practice of humility and self-contempt, and animate us with courage, patience, and alacrity in the prosecution of our pious desires and obligations. Let us be contented, continues the same great saint, to practise little virtues proportioned to our weakness and incapacities, such as patience to bear our own defects as well as those of others ; humility, meekness, affability, condescension, and readiness to oblige, &c. &c. It is essential not to yield to an uncalled for zeal after an imaginary perfection, which engrosses all our thoughts and prevents us from labouring to attain that towards which

we are commanded to direct all our exertions. I call an imaginary perfection that which we represent to ourselves we could easily reach, were we to be placed in different circumstances from those in which we actually are; and the thought of, and longing after which, inspires us with weariness and disgust in the accomplishment of our actual duties. You will sometimes hear people say, that if they were here, and not there, they would serve God with joy, and be only occupied with their eternal concerns. It is a seducing but very dangerous illusion; for, were they differently situated, they would do the very same, and even worse than they do now, because they would then be deprived of the graces granted to them for their actual state of life, God bestowing them according to the various circumstances in which we are: to those who are obliged to live at court, special graces to sanctify themselves in the midst of the pomps and vanities of the world, and which graces he would not give them were they in another situation: and thus he is pleased to act with regard to magistrates, soldiers, merchants, single or married persons of either sex, &c. &c. I call an imaginary perfection that which induces people to do the good which is not commanded them, whilst they neglect and omit that which they are strictly bound to do: they seem to be animated with the spirit of the royal prophet, and "eaten up with the zeal of the house of God" (Ps. lxxviii. 10); and they neglect the reformation of their manners; they often speak as if there were no virtue left in the world; and were they not restrained by a sort of human respect, they would be tempted to say, "We alone are left." Oh! let us strive to mend all that is reprehensible in us, and be persuaded, that, to correct one single defect in ourselves, will be more meritorious before God, than correcting excesses in others.

Another important rule of conduct is, never to yield to the temptation of committing a fault, how insignificant soever it may appear to you : when your conscience inwardly suggests to you that you ought to resist it, and if, through human frailty, you have fallen, to bear with resignation the humiliation resulting from your weakness ; be particularly attentive to listen to and obey with docility, the inward warning which the Holy Ghost is pleased to give you. His inspirations ought to be complied with, otherwise he will withdraw, and the loss of his enlightening and fortifying grace is irreparable. The faults of mere frailty, precipitation, or inadvertency, are nothing when compared with those which are the results of our wilfully turning a deaf ear to the voice of this Holy Spirit sweetly and secretly speaking to our souls. As for the faults of which we are conscious only after we have committed them, no anxiety or irritated self-love will repair them. Those painful feelings are always the effects of impatience or pride. The best use we can make of such faults is to bear them with humility and peace ; because, certainly, there is no true humility when the humiliation is borne with unwillingness and spite. On the contrary, when we condemn ourselves without seeking to excuse or palliate our faults, when we submit, without irritation or discouragement, to be before God covered with shame and confusion ; thus, turning the humiliation to profit ; then we draw, from the snake itself, the remedy necessary to eject from the wound the mortal venom of its sting. Thus the confusion which the pious soul feels at the consciousness of her failings, will become a powerful means to obtain the forgiveness of them, and a great preservative against relapses.

Be not solicitous for the morrow. Be not afraid of the temptations which may, perhaps, assault you on a future day, and which your frightened imagination re-

presents to you as monsters which it will never be in your power to overcome. What appears to you, at a distance, to be a numerous and a formidable army, is nothing, when seen nearer and with calmness, but a cluster of poplar-trees agitated by the wind, and which cannot hurt you; but, if you look at them with fear and trembling, you will be exposed to lose your way and fall into a precipice. Let us form and entertain a firm and general purpose to serve God with all our hearts, and as long as we live. This done, have no solicitude for the morrow: let us strive only to make a profitable use of the present day. When to-morrow is come, which then will be called to-day, let us likewise do our best to turn it to our spiritual advantage. In this regard we must have the greatest confidence in and unbounded resignation to the ever merciful and wise designs of God's providence over us. Therefore, instead of falling into despondency at the sight of your miseries, raise up your courage, and abandon yourself to hope. Remember, that that confidence to which I so forcibly exhort you, must be grounded on true humility, otherwise hope would degenerate into self-esteem and presumption. But, reflect at the same time, that true humility is generous, peaceable, and always free from dejection and lowness of spirits. Preserve, in the service of God, a loving and filial liberty, rejecting, as highly injurious to him all the thoughts which would fill your heart with distrust, perplexity, and anguish. Let a holy joy be always sweetly and modestly shining in your countenance, and in the whole tenour of your conduct. Thus you will prove that the God of peace dwells in your heart, and afford pleasure and comfort to all around you. Commit yourself entirely to his goodness for your perseverance in his service. He will give you the necessary grace to overcome all the obstacles which the world

or the enemy of our salvation may oppose to the execution of your pious resolutions. What the good pastor has done for you by bringing you back to his fold, is a happy presage and pledge of all the future graces which he reserves for you, and which he will never fail to grant you in case of need. Never—never distrust his mercy; when it is a heartfelt contrition for having offended him, which prompts us to cast ourselves at his sacred feet, we have the most solid motives to hope that he will hear our humble prayers. When we are sincerely returned to him, and have washed away all our iniquities in the tears of penance, a thousand years are no longer before him than a single day. We receive a new life on the day we begin again to serve him; and all the prevarications of our former life are wholly obliterated from his remembrance. He is the God of sinners, the benefactor of the ungrateful, the father of the prodigal son, the shepherd of the wandering sheep, the friend of the Samaritans, the Redeemer and Saviour of the wicked and profligate. In short, it seems that all the consolations of faith are destined, in a particular manner, for the repenting and converted sinner.

There are sometimes pious people who fail in their endeavours to attain perfection, because, in the practice of their inward life, their soul is like a sea perpetually agitated by storms. But if we inquire sedulously what can be the cause, we shall soon find out that those storms originated for the most part from self-love. They are tormented various ways, because they are inordinately and excessively fond of themselves. They resemble a miser that is suffering all the wants of poverty, because in the midst of all his riches, he still longs after more extensive possessions; or like the ambitious who, though they be loaded with powers and dignities, are yet gnawed with envy and bitter grief, because they

descry above them a degree of grandeur and power which they have not yet reached. That self-love which is the destroyer of all inward peace, comes itself from contracted and false notions respecting the service of God ; they adopt without sufficient discretion many practices which, though good and edifying in themselves, are not however attended with solid and lasting sentiments of piety. They confine their devotion within a narrow circle of prayers and good works, which do not convince them of their nothingness, and are incapable of raising their minds to a proper knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. They do not conceive an adequate idea of the admirable economy of religion, nor do they comprehend to what low degree of abasement man is reduced by sin. They are so fondly attached to the accomplishment of duties of their own making and choice, that when any unforeseen occurrence or impediment compels them to perform some other really essential, but not congenial to their feelings, they do it with ill grace, grumble, murmur, and thus lose the merit they would have acquired, had they acted with sweetness and generosity. When they read the lives of saints, without reflection on the particular characteristics of their sanctity, the measure of grace which they had received, the talents with which God had endowed them, and the supernatural light which guided them, they strive to imitate them in such of their actions which are less imitable, and to which they are not called. And as from want of a vocation, they fail in the indiscreet attempt, they are discouraged, plunged in bitter grief, and give up the most indispensable obligations and practices—such as prayer, silence, inward mortification, the study of Jesus Christ, and the precepts of his Gospel, in the accomplishment of which all the saints have excelled, and in which, whatever our circumstances and state of



life may be, we can imitate them with the greatest security and advantage. I must tell you with the liberty of a bosom friend, said St. Francis of Sales, to a lady who had consulted him, whosoever has a sincere desire of serving God, and avoiding sin, ought not to torment himself with the terrors of the judgments of God. For although they are to be dreaded, yet our fear of them ought not to be of that terrifying nature, which casts down, dejects, and oppresses the soul; it ought to be a fear so happily blended with confidence in the goodness of our Creator, that by those means it may become sweet and consoling to the heart.

Do not think that you ought no longer to trust in God, because you feel sometimes repugnances in the performance of your duties, and an unaccountable weakness and instability in your resolutions, and that at certain times it seems to you, that if some great sacrifice were required of you, it would be quite out of your power to make it. That we cannot answer for the morrow, and that our perseverance in virtue will remain always doubtful, as long as we live, cannot be called in question. If we could have a full certainty that we should be able to resist every possible temptation at the moment of the trial, then the Holy Scriptures would have deceived us, when they so clearly declare, that we shall never possibly know in this world whether we are worthy of hatred or love, and that we must work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Did not our divine Saviour, in that admirable prayer which he commanded us to address to God, require from us to ask, not to be led into temptation, and if persecuted in one city to flee into another? Is it not evident from these two passages, that we ought to dread our weakness, and that a complete security is not to be expected during our earthly pilgrimage? Therefore a diffidence of our strength, and a consciousness of our

frailty, are not a sign of the insecurity of our resolutions, or that the love of God is not predominant in our hearts. It is merely a just and candid acknowledgment of our weakness and natural propensity to evil. It is, indeed, safer for us to be diffident of ourselves, than to rely upon our own courage and strength, provided we expect from God's grace, what otherwise we should ever despair to be able to perform by our sole exertions. Many who had flattered themselves, before the day of battle, to do wonders for God, fled shamefully at the first onset; whilst others who were afraid of running away, and laying down their arms at the first and even at the bare report of an approaching enemy, encountered him with resolution, fought with intrepidity, and ultimately gained a most complete victory; because the sentiment of their weakness penetrated them with humanity, excited them to redouble their prayers and vigilance, and drew down upon them from heaven, a supernatural energy and fortitude, proof against the most violent assaults, and which they would have in vain sought for in themselves.

According to the unerring rules of his all-wise providence, Almighty God never gives particular graces, when they are not wanted. But at the moment of need, he never fails to grant them, if on our side we are faithful to ask for them. "Ask, and you shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened to you," says our Lord. Therefore we must always hope, that he will hear our prayers, and be himself our light, support, and strength. At all times rely upon the following words of the Scriptures: "Why art thou sad, O my soul, and why dost thou disquiet me? Hope in God; if all the armies of hell were to stand against me, I shall not fear, because thou art with me." Therefore, since you are truly desirous to serve God with fidelity, why would you fear so much your weakness? Is not God powerful enough to

fortify you? And has ever any man hoped in him, and been confounded?

I shall conclude this letter by the following reflections of St. Francis of Sales, "God has commanded us to do all that which depends upon us to acquire virtue. It is consequently a duty incumbent upon us to leave nothing undone on our side, in order to succeed in such an important and necessary enterprise. But after having sowed and watered, let us not forget that God alone can give the increase to, and ripen the fruit of our good purposes. Therefore it is from Divine Providence alone, that we can expect success for our desires and labours. If we do not perceive that we make such a progress in piety as we ardently wish, let us remain in peace, and let tranquillity always reign in your soul. The husbandman is not blamed for not having a plentiful harvest, but for not having tilled and sown the ground in a proper manner. . . . But if I be fully sensible, do you say, that the little progress which I make, comes from my own fault, how can I refrain from giving way to grief and anxiety? I have often told it you, and it cannot be too often repeated; we ought to repent, and be sorry for the faults which we have committed. Our sorrow and repentance must be sincere, strong, and persevering, but tranquil, and free from trouble, disquietude, and despondency. Are you well assured, that you have been guilty, humble yourself before God; acknowledge your guilt, cast yourself at the feet of our Saviour, implore his mercy and forgiveness, and if necessary, go to your confessor to declare your sins, and receive absolution. This being done, and having from the bottom of your heart detested the offence, accept with joy the objection which necessarily follows from it . . . A mortal sin, committed by a pious soul," says the same holy bishop in another place (a misfortune which I hope through the

mercy of God will never happen to you), "is not a proof that that soul has made no progress in devotion, when that sin has not been the result of premeditation, and when she has no intention of persisting in it, or indulging any criminal habit. Such a sin, it is true, deprives her of the friendship of God ; but as soon as she returns to him with a hearty and firm purpose of amendment, she immediately recovers all what she had lost by her fall."

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## XXVII.

### ON SCRUPULOSITY.

I see, madam, by your last letter that the liveliness of your imagination, and the excessive delicacy of your feelings, joined with your ardent desire of serving God with the utmost perfection, have filled your mind with doubts and anxieties, and that, without being aware of it, you are insensibly tending to scrupulosity. As this disposition, if indulged, is one of the greatest obstacles to the practice of virtue, for those who sincerely aspire, as you do, to be solidly virtuous, I beg of you to pay the utmost attention to the following reflections. They are not only the result of my personal experience during the space of fifty years, but they are also grounded on the doctrine of the saints, and the unanimous decisions of the most enlightened and pious spiritual writers, and the constant practice of the most experienced guides in the direction of souls. Scrupulosity makes those, who let themselves to be influenced and controlled by it, suffer an inward martyrdom, which increasing every day, exposes them frequently to lose the use of their reason

respecting matters of conscience, though at other times, and with regard to other subjects, they are remarkable for their good sense and wisdom. But as a timorous conscience and a scrupulous conscience may be easily confounded with one another, it is highly necessary to know what is to be understood by a timorous, and a scrupulous soul.

A timorous soul fears above all things to offend Almighty God ; watches with incessant care over her senses, imagination, thoughts, and feelings, in order to avoid whatever might be displeasing to him. When she has committed a fault, she is sincerely sorry for it, hastens to repair it by every means in her power, and be reconciled with her offended Creator. The forgiveness which, through the application of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of penance, she hopes to have obtained, is for her a fresh motive to be more and more upon her guard ; and thus she draws from the daily experience of her frailty, and the reiterated proofs of his patience and unbounded mercy, a deeper regret of her least failings, a more ardent desire of correcting her imperfections, and showing him her gratitude and love by exerting herself to advance every day in virtue. Such are the distinguishing characteristics of a timorous soul which the world, that is to say, a very blind and incompetent judge concerning spirituality, calls *a scrupulous* soul. But in this, as well as in whatever refers to devotion, the world is in the greatest illusion.

A scrupulous soul, is a soul that fears not only to offend God, but imagines that she is always offending him. It is a soul labouring under perpetual troubles, doubts, and perplexities ; exhausting her strength in fighting against mere trifles, always occupied to sift with eagerness into the inmost recesses of her conscience, examining with a trembling anxiety her actions, words,

and particularly her intentions. It is an over-fearful soul frightened at every thing, and whose imagination, like that of children who have been terrified by stories of ghosts and goblins, fancies without the least grounds, that she meets at every step phantoms and monsters she cannot resist. It is a soul that discovers precepts of a rigorous and strict obligation in the most insignificant things, and in the most innocent and sometimes even indispensable actions thinks that there are wilful transgressions, or at least improper motives. It is a diffident soul, distrusting the goodness of God nearly as much as she distrusts herself; ingenious to find out something reprehensible in every thing which she does, thinks, or feels, tormenting herself without reason; for whom the performance of every duty is a matter of suspicion, fear, and remorse; persuading herself against the clearest evidence, that, either in the integrity of her confession, the sincerity of her contrition, or the firmness of her resolutions, there is always something essential wanting, and consequently that God cannot and ought not to forgive her. Hence her pusillanimity, dejection, melancholy, terrors, sometimes even despair, or a strong temptation of abandoning the service of God and gratifying her passions.

A timorous soul is called so, because she is penetrated with a lively fear of offending God. The scrupulous soul, it is true, is animated with the same fear; but in the former, that fear, though strong, is yet moderated by a great confidence in divine assistance and mercy; whilst in the latter, it is excessive, and not tempered by any consoling and hopeful considerations. That fear, as I have already said, induces the timorous soul to redouble her vigilance, but this vigilance is in her exempt from those alarms and fears which keep the scrupulous bound upon a rack. The one fears to offend God, whilst the

other is prepossessed with the belief more than the fear of having offended him. For it is certain that the scrupulous are much more influenced by the imagination than by the heart. A timorous soul is circumspect, and always acts with deliberation and prudence. The scrupulous, bewildered by her incessant perplexities, is often incapable of reflection and even of thinking. She is always encompassed by a thick cloud which prevents her from discerning the objects around her, or as if she were in the midst of a storm, she sees nothing but by the flash of the lightning, and hears nothing but the terrifying claps of thunder which continually resound within her; she is deaf and blind to every thing else. Those two souls are equally willing to serve God. The timorous soul actuated by a filial fear, but encouraged by sweet confidence, is supported and animated in all her exertions to attain to the perfection of her state of life; the scrupulous soul, convinced beforehand of the pretended inutility of all her endeavours to reach that happy end, fatigued and exhausted by her continual struggles, loses courage, grows weaker and weaker every day. Thus, dispirited under the weight of imaginary infidelities, obduracy, or want of corresponding with the graces of God, she becomes really unable to perceive a single ray of light to guide her tottering steps in the career of virtue. In short, if a timorous soul have the misfortune to offend God; although she be penetrated with heartfelt contrition, and dread his unerring justice, she is not destitute of consolation; her tears are sweet, and her regret attended with hope. A tender and unreserved confidence in the mercies of God reanimates her, and restores to her the peace which she had lost by yielding to sin. The scrupulous soul is also repenting for her faults, but she falsely imagines, that she is without any repentance, or that it is so much mixed with human, self-

ish, or criminal motives, that she comes out from the sacred tribunal more guilty than she entered it. Instead of being relieved and supported by the encouraging words of her spiritual guide, she fancies that she deceives him, or that he does not understand her; and though she be obliged to confess that his advice and observations are well grounded, yet she persists that they are not applicable to her case. Thus she remains in a state of obstinacy in her senseless notions, almost bordering upon folly. If we trace up that striking difference between two souls apparently animated with the same sentiments, we shall find that the scrupulous soul is obstinately attached to her own thoughts and judgment, and wishes to have a certainty of the sanctity of all her feelings and actions; whilst the timorous soul, always disposed to submit to the decisions of her ecclesiastic superiors, lets herself be guided by their advice, and without seeking for a security which is not to be enjoyed in this transitory life, abandons herself with confidence to the mercy of her crucified Redeemer.

Scrupulosity in some people is the effect of weakness of mind, limited understanding, and a sort of absolute incapacity of listening to the voice of reason, and consequently of appreciating the true spirit of the Gospel. With them as with those who are under the influence of some incurable mental disease, a tender compassion, unwearied patience, and gentle advice or instruction when they seem to be susceptible of it, are the only remedies that can be applied. They are much to be pitied, and one may entertain a confident hope that the faults which are the consequence of their scrupulosity, being independent of their will, shall not be laid to their charge. In others, scrupulosity is almost always a temptation of the enemy of our salvation, in order to avert them from the practice of virtue, by rendering it



for them a galling and insupportable yoke. But never forget that scrupulosity does never proceed from the influence of grace. It makes the conscience timorous, but scrupulous, never. When grace is diffused in a soul, it is always attended with peace. The contrition which it excites, how strong soever it may be, always produces an inward unction which comforts and encourages the soul, whilst scrupulosity fills her with desolation, confusion and trouble. Grace inclines and animates us to the practice of virtue, scrupulosity deters us from it, by the disgust and anxieties of which it is the inevitable and inexhaustible source. Grace renders virtue sweet, amiable, and engaging; scrupulosity makes it tiresome, forbidding, and unsociable. A soul prepossessed and overpowered by scrupulosity, very often omits essential duties without remorse. Her anxious care in finding out and weighing with rigour imaginary faults, makes her blind to real transgressions. Severe and unjust to others as she is to herself, she indiscriminately condemns their actions, not according to the principles of sound reason and strict justice, but according as she is herself afflicted. Her imagination, taken up with phantoms which frighten her, is continually wandering and distressed. Never thinking that she has fulfilled as she ought the duty of praying, she repeats over and over again her prayers, till at length exhausted by that senseless repetition, she knows no longer what she says, nor even what she thinks. It is the same with her confessions, they are endless, and without affording her the smallest relief, because she cannot be prevailed upon to obey with simplicity. Thus from all the pious exercises which she performs, and which ought to be for her a source of consolation and peace, she derives nothing but uneasiness, melancholy, and gloom, which render her a burden to herself, and a

daily cross to her husband, servants, children, and friends. Thus, without being aware of it, she does a great injury to religion; because the inconsistencies of her conduct, and unevenness of her temper are considered as the necessary appendages of devotion. Grace softens the heart, and inspires with duty and obedience. Scrupulosity renders it dry, hard, obstinate, and insensible to the impressions of grace itself. Grace captivates, or at least calms the imagination; scrupulosity excites, and lets loose and without control, all its extravagances. Grace enlightens the mind; scrupulosity fills it up with the thickest clouds and darkness. It is therefore evident that scrupulosity can never be the production of grace; on the contrary that it is a very great obstacle to its operations. Scrupulosity may sometimes be a temptation which God permits, as any other, for the wisest purposes, to try our fidelity and purify our hearts. But when it is so, perseverance in accomplishing all our obligations notwithstanding the difficulties, repugnance, disgust, and opposition which we feel; docility, by renouncing our own judgment, and ready, unreserved, and implicit obedience to the decision of our spiritual guide, are the most efficacious remedy and a sure preservative against its baneful effects. But a scrupulous soul that is tenacious of her own opinion, and obstinately refuses to let herself be judged and conducted, whatever she may say to justify her disobedience, is in a very dangerous state, and may be considered as a sick person attacked with an incurable and almost mortal disease.

You tell me that you are at a loss and much perplexed how to discern yielding and wilfully adhering to sin, from involuntary impressions, feelings, doubts, and scruples. It is a principle admitted as undeniable by all divines, that one cannot commit a sin without a reflected

and deliberate will of committing it. One must acknowledge, it is true, that this will is more or less reflected and deliberate, but more or less it always exists. To sin there must be liberty, but there is no liberty, when there is no possibility of reflection or deliberation. However it is of the highest importance to observe that when we speak of the necessity of *wilfulness and deliberation*, we do not allude to those sins which are the result of unjustifiable ignorance, relaxed principles of morality, false notions of the justice, goodness, mercy of God, or bad habits wilfully contracted, and deliberately indulged, from which follow sins, real sins, even grievous sins, though frequently committed without thought and reflection, and the positive intention, or even the idea of offending God by committing them. Alas! there are too many people in the world, who verify by their conduct the maxim of the wise man, "There is a way which seemeth just to a man, but the ends thereof lead to death" (Prov. xiv. 12), and thus are truly guilty in the sight of God, although they fondly flatter themselves to be without reproach. This distinction made, one may consider as no sins, all the indeliberate and resisted extravagances of the imagination, those phantoms, and unwilful distractions in which the soul is only passive, all the first emotions to which we have given no occasion, and which we should be happy not to feel, in fine all the doubts and perplexities which arise from the fear of a consent, of which, however, the heart is not conscious.

Not to be led into illusion or useless troubles of conscience, it is necessary to distinguish doubts from fears. When we have a *solid* doubt, whether a thing be lawful or not, we should not certainly presume to act; but an *excessive fear*, is not a *solid doubt*. Generally we should not easily persuade ourselves that we are obliged to do

a particular thing when the obligation appears doubtful ; but when we are convinced that it is really obligatory, or when it is so very probable, that we might or ought with reason and propriety to act, as if the obligation was quite unquestionable, we must without hesitation comply with it, without losing most precious time to examine whether our want of compliance would be a venial or mortal sin. To be authorized and prompted to do that thing, it is sufficient to have solid reasons to think that in doing so, we accomplish the will of God. In order to preserve an inward peace, you must judge your sentiments according to a principle acknowledged as incontrovertible by all spiritual writers, viz., that a soul that is not in habit of sin, but on the contrary, is animated with an habitual determination, never to consent to or commit any one with wilful deliberation, ought not to be disturbed by the perplexities and doubts, which may now and then occur to her mind, or be suggested to her imagination by the spirit of darkness. As long as she perseveres in that happy disposition, unless she has a clear certainty, that she has wilfully been guilty of sin, she should not consider every failing incident to our weak nature, as a grievous transgression, and condemn herself on this account with severity and harshness ; but casting herself spiritually at the feet of our merciful Redeemer, and relying with an humble confidence on his infinite goodness, confess her infidelities to him with hearty sorrow, trust in his forgiveness, and without any further examination dispel all anxious thoughts and reflections and remain in peace. We must do our utmost, says St. Francis of Sales, to procure to ourselves tranquillity of conscience, not because it is the parent of satisfaction and joy, but because it is the daughter of the love of God, and of the resignation of our will. “ Il faut surtout se procurer la tranquillité,

non point parce qu'elle est mère du contentement, mais parce qu'elle est fille de l'amour de Dieu, et de la résignation de notre propre volonté."

The recurrence of importune or bad thoughts which may strike the imagination, dwell in it unperceived for a considerable time, and even perhaps make some impression upon the senses, ought not to be looked upon as a wilful consent or deliberate acquiescence. The great dread which you have of them when they happen, is an evident proof that they do not originate from the will. What may be impressed upon us against our inclination, and what we have solid motives to believe contrary to our will, is neither a sin nor an imperfection. The thoughts which arise in our minds, or the sensations which we may experience, are by themselves neither a vice nor a virtue. Their *morality* depends entirely upon the part which the will takes either in their production, or in our neglect of the necessary precautions to prevent them, or in the subsequent consent which we give to them, when we are become sensible of their nature or tendency. Therefore be not apprehensive to have committed a sin which you sincerely hate, and to which it is your earnest desire and firm resolution never to consent. Be thoroughly persuaded, says St. Francis of Sales, that all the temptations of hell cannot defile a soul that dislikes them. "Croyez certainement que toutes les tentations de l'enfer ne sauraient souiller un esprit qui ne les aime pas." In such occasions, *slighting* is generally *the best fighting*. Almighty God requires of us what depends upon our will, and no more. Feelings are not in our power, we cannot have them or be delivered from them when we please. The most hardened sinners have sometimes in spite of themselves remorse of conscience, and thoughts of the necessity of a conversion. The greatest saints also have

been now and then assailed by the most shameful temptations, which nevertheless they held always in the utmost detestation and horror. Well, the feelings of remorse of the first did not make them acceptable, nor the temptations of the second guilty, before God, because the feelings of both were contrary to and rejected by their will, which alone depended upon them. Be therefore guided in the judgment of what passes within you by this maxim of St. Francis of Sales, it is not *feeling* but *consenting* which can either sanctify or defile the soul.

Walk on in the paths of virtue with alacrity and humble assurance. Why all those anxieties? why that diffidence and pusillanimity? Are you not under the paternal government of a God, who, as the Scripture says, "winketh at the sins of man," for the sake of repentance? Are you not under the guidance and protection of that good Shepherd, who leaves the ninety-nine sheep in the desert, to go after that which was lost in order to find it, and when he has found it, lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing to bring it back to the fold? If carried away by the violence of the temptation, or seduced by the deceitful charms of the world, you had departed from the paternal home, and been reduced to hunger and nakedness, are you not still the child of that tender and indulgent parent, who wants only to see the first steps of your return to him, to run to meet you, fall upon your neck, press you against his affectionate bosom, and restore to you his friendship, and all the advantages which you had so deservedly forfeited by yielding to sin? Do you not know that love ought to put away fear? "When we behold," says St. Francis of Sales, speaking of those who let themselves to be governed and overcome by scrupulosity, or exaggerated and excessive fears, "the sadness which overwhelms them, the terror which frightens them at every motion,

and often in the performance of meritorious actions, we should take them rather for unfortunate slaves groaning under the tyranny of a merciless master, than for children enjoying the happiness of living under the mild dominion of a tender Father, and a beneficent and merciful God. Why," continues the same enlightened saint, "that gloom, those dejected looks, that melancholy countenance in the presence of the best of Fathers? O ye, who are sincerely desirous to serve God in spirit and truth, shake off those groundless fears. Lift up to heaven your eyes animated with hope and confidence; your sadness and diffidence are an outrage to your bountiful Creator and daily Benefactor, and a great injury to yourselves. The worship which he commands and expects from you, must proceed from a noble and generous principle, which leaves to the soul all its liberty and innocent feelings. He rejects a servile and trembling homage that contracts the mind, and dejects the heart. O ye weak and pusillanimous souls, reanimate your drooping spirits; it is God himself who has ordained his ministers to encourage you. "Say to the faint-hearted, Take courage and fear not. Rejoice in the Lord; again and again I say, rejoice in the Lord."—St. Paul.

In the moment of trouble, never presume nor attempt to examine your real dispositions; your frightened imagination would magnify into heinous crimes the most excusable frailties, and sometimes even the most insignificant and innocent actions. As long as the agitation lasts, never try to discover how the temptation came upon you, and how far you may have yielded to it. Wait with patience till the storm is over and calm restored. As the inexperienced pilot, who, in a violent hurricane, leaves the rudder, in order to look back and examine how his ship has been driven by the fury of the wind among the rocks with which it is surrounded

on all sides, will inevitably be split against them and shipwrecked ; so the scrupulous soul that lets herself be overcome and guided by immoderate or groundless fears, and indulges herself in an unseasonable examination of her conscience, is exposed to an imminent danger of falling into the very sin which she so earnestly wishes to avoid, or unreasonably is afraid of having committed.

Whenever you have no clear certainty that which you intend to do, say, or omit, is a sin, you must despise all the doubts which may arise in your mind, and act as if you had none, deciding yourself in such occurrences, not by your personal opinion or judgment, but in conformity to the decision of your confessor, who has advised you to do so. Supposing, that by thus taking no account of your doubts, you were to be mistaken ; your mistakes would not be imputed to you, your obedience in such a case would exonerate you from the guilt of presumption or thoughtlessness, and even render, in some degree, those very mistakes acts of virtue, because they would be the result of a well-grounded diffidence of yourself, a true spirit of abnegation and submission to the will of God, manifested to you by his minister. In order to obviate every possible perplexity on the subject, every day in your morning prayer, form the intention of being guided and determined in all your doubts by the above-mentioned rule. This intention will *virtually* persevere in every particular circumstance ; though you may not now and then have it *actually* present to your mind at the moment of your determination. A traveller who sets off with the intention to go to a particular place, continues to walk with that same intention, and ultimately reaches the end of his journey, though he may have stopped at different times upon the road, and by entertaining various thoughts forgotten the motive of his



journey. So it will be with you, all your daily actions will be influenced by your morning offering and determination. Believe me a pious soul that has had the misfortune of having really offended God, has no doubts or mere anxieties; she has a distinct and positive knowledge of her fault, and is penetrated with a deep regret and sorrow for it. Therefore when you feel only doubts or perplexities, you may conclude that you have not been guilty, or at the utmost, that your sin was venial. In short, in all your doubts or scruples, be always guided in your judgment by the two following maxims of St. Francis of Sales: 1. "A soul truly obedient shall never be lost." 2. "We must be contented to know from our spiritual father that we are walking in the right road without inquiring how."

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## XXV.

### TEMPTATIONS.

"As long as we live in this world," says the pious author of the *Imitation of Christ*, "we cannot be without tribulation and temptation. All the saints have passed through many tribulations and temptations, and have profited by them . . . There is no place so holy, nor place so retired, where there are not temptations and adversities. . . . Some suffer greater temptations in the beginning of their conversion, some in the end, and some there are who are much troubled in a manner all their lifetime. Some are but slightly tempted according to the equity and wisdom of the ordinance of God, who weighs the state and merits of

man, and preordains all for the salvation of his elect.” “All is a snare for man, as long as he is invested with his mortal frame,” says St. Jerome; and often the greatest temptations arise from the most exalted graces. The soul finds snares, and occasions of temptation in the noble pleasures of the mind as well as in the low gratifications of the senses. In the midst of spiritual delights and consolations, trials are often necessary to entertain a spirit of humility, and be a safeguard and preservative against the seducing allurements of pride. “Lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me,” says St. Paul, “there was given me a sting of my flesh and angel of Satan to buffet me; for which thing I thrice besought the Lord that he might depart from me, and he said to me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity.”—2 Cor. xii. 7.

Providence is pleased to bestow on some a longer continuance of peace and exemption from trials, than on others. But as the term of this continuance, is hidden from us, all flattering and confident expectations are without solid foundation; at one period or another it is certain that the calm is to be troubled, and the dark cloud is to arise, and how soon that period is to come you cannot tell. In your health or your fortune, or among your connexions and friends, be assured that some trial awaits you, for human life never stands still for a long while. To faults all are subject, to troubles all are exposed. As that man is the most virtuous who can be charged with the fewest faults, so that life is the happiest which suffers the fewest troubles. To look for entire exemption of them is to court disappointment. Our divine Saviour himself, in order to encourage us by his example, and show us that “in that wherein he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able also to succour them who are tempted,” permitted the devil

to tempt and solicit him to commit the abominable crime of falling down at his feet to adore him. We must not, therefore, despair when we are tempted, but pray to God with greater fervour, that he may vouchsafe to help us in all tribulation, and he will, undoubtedly, according to the words of St. Paul, "make such issue with the temptation that we may be able to sustain it." Although it be not only commendable, but even a strict duty to pour forth our whole heart before the Almighty in our spiritual as well as temporal distresses, and beg of his infinite goodness, not to "lead us into temptation, but to deliver us from evil;" yet, we ought not to do it with anxious and excessive eagerness. To the most fervent and earnest prayer must be joined unreserved submission to God's will, and a perfect resignation to suffer as long, and in the manner he may be pleased to ordain. "O my heavenly Father, should we say, if this chalice may not pass from me, but I must drink it, thy will be done."—Matt. "Think not strange, therefore, as the apostle St. Peter says, the burning heat, which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you, knowing that the same affliction befalleth your brethren who are in the world. You shall greatly rejoice, if now, you for a little while must be sorrowful in divers temptations, that the trial of your faith, much more precious than gold (which is tried by the fire), may be found unto praise and glory, and honour at the appearance of Jesus Christ."—1 Pet. v. 9.

In order to know what we have to do in the temptations which we may have to encounter during the course of our earthly pilgrimage, it is highly important for us to inquire from which cause they may originate; whether they be of our own choice, the effect of our negligence, or the unavoidable attendants of the condition of life in which Divine Providence has placed us, and which we

are not at liberty to change, and consequently which we can reasonably consider as trials, which God permits we should pass through, to purify our souls as gold in the crucible, and render us more acceptable before him. If our temptations be the result of our temerity, the neglect of the precautions enjoined by religion, the contempt of previous warnings, and the secret inspirations of our conscience, to expect a supernatural assistance from above, and flatter ourselves that we shall be able to resist and overcome them, would be the height of presumption, and a downright illusion. For although God be "faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able" (1 Cor. x. 13); yet he has never engaged himself to deliver us from dangers which we have fallen into, by disregarding his most solemn admonitions and severe threats. On the contrary, he has most positively declared, that "he that loveth danger shall perish in it."—Eccl. iii. 27.

If they examine themselves according to this infallible rule, I am afraid that many people, who bitterly complain of the violence of their passions, and the pretended insuperable difficulty they experience to subdue them, will discover to their great confusion, that to themselves alone they ought to be attributed. For instance, if those who read books against religion, or lend a willing ear to the discourses of freethinkers, although the Church by her decrees, and her ministers by their exhortations have constantly forbid it, be assailed by temptations against faith; if other people who lead an effeminate life, indulging without restraint all their propensities, and "trusting in the uncertainty of riches" (1 Tim. vi. 17), find it very hard to fight against the temptations of the flesh, and too often yield to them; although they have been forewarned by all the maxims of the Gospel, and all the instructions which they have received from their tender

years, that such a life is incompatible with virtue and salvation, is it a thing to be wondered at? "If any man will come after me, says Jesus Christ, let him deny himself."—Luke ix. 23.

What can we think of Christians who, knowing that the world is filled with dangers, and that it is exceedingly difficult to preserve one's innocence untainted from its contagion; yet with lively imagination, and hearts so flexible as to yield easily to every impression, will mix indiscriminately in all its societies, partake in all its pleasures, frequent its theatres, without reflecting on their weakness, and without the least fear of the dangers which threaten them; and thus expose to ruin that virtue, which even in solitude, and in the company of the wise and good, would hardly escape unhurt. From those unquestionable considerations, one may infer with the utmost certainty that for people of such description, the sole resource which is left to them against their temptations, is flight. They ought to be persuaded that they are threatened with an immediate and irretrievable loss, if they hesitate for a moment to break off their dangerous connexions, because they are accountable for all the faults which are the results of the circumstances in which, of their own accord, they have placed themselves. However, as it may happen that people most sincerely converted to God, may be after their conversion assailed by the same temptations to which they had formerly been accessary through rashness or wilful deliberation, they must be told for their encouragement and comfort, that those temptations being no longer the result of their choice, temerity, and want of due precautions, their dispositions being changed, and an ardent desire and firm resolution of resisting them being predominant in their heart, they may entertain a confident hope, that our merciful Saviour will not permit they should be tempted

beyond their strength, that his all-powerful grace will support their weakness, and make them gain the victory. The recurrence of such temptations they must bear with patience, accepting them with submission as a part of their penance : as a sort of atonement for having in their former life indulged them without remorse, as it is so beautifully expressed in the hymn of the office of St. Mary of Egypt. “ *In pœnam scelerum sæpe recursant importuna malæ gaudia vitæ ; sed versans animo debita noxis tot tormenta, graves comprimit æstus.*”

Respecting temptations of which we have been neither the cause or the wilful occasion, there are some general rules to which, if we be faithful to adhere, will most efficaciously contribute to make us preserve our innocence undefiled, and the peace of our conscience unaltered.

1. Not to dread temptations with anxiety and terror, nor to wish with impatience and too great eagerness to be delivered from them ; because an excessive fear, or too ardent a desire of deliverance, would keep us in perpetual alarms, which would inevitably tend to render the temptation always present to our mind, weaken our strength, and thus encourage the enemy to attack us with greater advantage. The God whom we adore and serve is more sincerely concerned for our happiness, than the most affectionate father and tender mother can ever be for their most beloved children : “ *Nemo tam pater ut Deus,*” says Tertullian. Therefore, under the most severe trials, and in what situation soever we may be placed by his all-wise providence, we are assured that we shall never be left without assistance and help. If he prolong the duration of temptations, it is for our greater good. He knows that when they are borne with a spirit of conformity to his will, they always bring forth abundant fruits of salvation in faithful souls ; they serve to increase in them sentiments of the most profound humi-

lity, excite their vigilance, exercise their patience and courage, entertain their fervour, and teach them to sympathize with the trials and distresses of others. In short, there is no doubt that they are either ordained or permitted, to make them deserve and obtain a brighter crown in heaven. Consequently, instead of giving way to gloomy thoughts and melancholy forebodings from the fear of temptations, or during their influence, we should encourage ourselves in the struggle, by the following consolatory passages of the Holy Scriptures: "Ye that fear the Lord, hope in him: and mercy shall come to you for your delight. He that adoreth with joy, shall be accepted, and his prayer shall approach even to the clouds. Delight in the Lord, and he will give the requests of thy heart. The joyfulness of the heart is the life of a man, and a never-failing treasure of holiness. On the contrary, the sadness of the heart is every plague. Give not, therefore, thy soul to sadness, and afflict not thyself in thy own self. Have pity on thy soul pleasing God. . . . Gather up thy heart in his holiness and drive away sadness from thee; for sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it."—Eccl.

2. We should be persuaded that by patience and true humility, we shall be made stronger than all our enemies, and that by degrees with longanimity, we shall, by God's grace better overcome them than by harshness, and our own importunity. (Im. of Christ.) The most pious souls who have from their most tender years, believed without the shadow of a doubt all the tenets of our holy religion, are nevertheless assailed, sometimes, by violent temptations against faith. It is often the case with persons who have imbibed from their youth erroneous principles, which are grown up, as it were, in proportion as they advanced in age, and become almost a

second nature in them. Although their conversion have been the result of long, diligent, assiduous, and most exact study and inquiries, and of a thorough conviction of the incontrovertible evidences upon which the Catholic doctrine is grounded ; yet, at certain times it seems that their old prejudices revive with redoubled strength ; hence, without having in their power to account for it, their mind is tormented with perplexities, which they imagine they cannot solve to their satisfaction. Oh, let them not be alarmed : it is a stratagem of the enemy to shake their good resolutions, and induce them to abandon the paths of truth and virtue. The crafty seducer flatters himself by filling their heart with troubles and disquietude, to bring them back under his dominion, by the prospect of enjoying a perfect peace and tranquillity of conscience. Let them beware not to yield to the idea which may be suggested to them, that in order to remove their anxieties, it is proper for them to enter into a fresh discussion or examination of the article of faith, a doubt of which has been raised in their mind ; instead of this being a means of clearing up and removing their difficulties, the state of agitation in which they are, would render them quite incapable of a calm and impartial investigation, and expose them to the almost inevitable danger of magnifying the most insignificant and evidently false arguments into unanswerable objections. “ An explicit profession of some article of our faith,” says Bossuet, “ is necessary ; but not at all times : and very often it is better to be satisfied with a simple act of submission to all the decisions of the Church ; and this is chiefly to be done in temptations and troubles. To strive with violent efforts to make acts contrary to the temptation under which one is suffering, is to fatigue one’s head and torment oneself to no purpose. A simple look or aspira-



tion of the heart, and letting the temptation pass away, with paying as little attention to it as possible, is much better."

With regard to people who are sincerely pious, and who have received a solid education, and are well instructed, temptations against faith may be considered as trials, and of course, in which there is no sin. Prayer, patience, and unbounded confidence in the goodness of God, and in the assistance of his grace, is the best preservative against them. The best proof which you can give him of your gratitude for all the favours which he has bestowed upon you, is to abandon yourself blindfolded to his infinite mercy. In despite of your feelings and repugnances, if you be violently tempted, cry up to him in the anguish of your heart, using the words of the Gospel: "Increase my faith, I do believe, O Lord, help my unbelief" (Mark ix.), and be well assured that he will not let your soul perish. When you are perfectly calm, if in your readings, or otherwise, you were to meet with difficulties which you could not easily explain away, you should not on that account be troubled, but refer them either to your confessor when you see him, or to some other learned priest, and in the mean while remain quiet and composed, being persuaded beforehand, that they will be removed after an unprejudiced examination, as you have already experienced respecting other points, which at first sight had appeared to you quite inexplicable or insoluble.

Faith is the foundation of hope. The more lively we are impressed with a strong belief of the love of God for us, the power of his grace, the efficacy of the merits of Jesus Christ, applied to us by the sacraments, when received in proper dispositions, so much the more assured shall we be to enjoy peace and inward consolations. But these desirable sentiments not being always

predominant in our souls, and on the contrary, being sometimes counterbalanced and overpowered by the ideas of the uncertainty of our predestination, the unfathomable depth of the judgments of the Almighty, and the severity of his justice. These awful truths too frequently dwelt upon, may become the occasion of great distress and dangerous temptations. This we can easily discover by the impression left upon our minds. If our reflections inspire us with despondency, they ought not to be indulged for a moment, otherwise they will, by insensible degrees, lead to a disgust of the accomplishment of our religious and social duties, and sometimes to despair.

St. Francis of Sales, and all spiritual writers advise those who are visited by such temptations, carefully to reject all melancholy thoughts and forebodings respecting their future destiny, or predestination. Instead of tormenting themselves, and losing their time in vain and painful inquiries, they tell them, Do now what you would do, if you had had an infallible certainty of your eternal salvation, and you will be more assured of it than if an angel had revealed it to you. Do not indulge the wanderings and frights of your imagination; it is a real fault to wish to know, in opposition to the will of God, what he is pleased to keep hidden from us, instead of adoring with profound and respectful submission the inscrutable designs of the adorable and always merciful ways of his providence, enjoying at the same time the comforts of his divine presence, and accomplishing his commandments. “Gregoria, a lady of the bedchamber of the empress, being troubled with scruples, wrote to St. Gregory the Great, that she should never be at ease till he would obtain of God, by a revelation, an assurance that her sins were forgiven her. ‘You ask,’ answered the holy and learned Pope, ‘what is both

difficult and unprofitable : difficult, because I am unworthy to receive a revelation ; unprofitable, because an absolute assurance of your pardon does not suit your state. Till you can no longer weep for your sins, you ought always to fear and tremble for them, and wash them all away by daily tears. . . . Security is the parent of negligence.”—Ep. xxv.

“ Never allow yourself to seek with curiosity, whether you will be in the number of the elect or the reprobate. Keep your eyes fixed on God ; you will thereby discover a thousand miseries in your soul ; but at the same time an inexhaustible source of goodness in him, and your miseries the object of his infinite goodness and mercy, says St. Francis of Sales. God looks down upon you with love, you cannot call it in question ; since he vouchsafes to do so, even with regard to the greatest sinners, as soon as they show a sincere desire of being converted to him. Have you not an intention to serve him, and constantly adhere to him ? And who has inspired you with that intention ? Is it not himself from his love for you ? The weaker you are, the more lively is his affection for you. Never, therefore, wilfully entertain thoughts contrary to this undeniable and consoling truth. When they occur, do not look at them ; avert your eyes from their iniquity. Turn yourself to God with a courageous humility, to speak to him of his goodness, which induces him to love us poor, destitute, infirm, abject, and miserable as we are. . . . Enlarge your heart, dilate your soul, renewing the protestation which you have made to him to love and serve him to the end of your life. When a certain person, in anxiety of mind, was often wavering between hope and fear, and on a time being overwhelmed with grief, had prostrated himself in prayer before a certain altar, he revolved these things within himself, saying, ‘ If I did

but know that I should still persevere !” And presently he heard with him an answer from God : ‘ And if thou didst know this what wouldst thou do ? Do now what thou wouldst then do, and thou shalt be secure.’ And, immediately being comforted and strengthened, he committed himself to the divine will, and his anxious waverings ceased ; neither had he a mind any more to search curiously to know what should befall him hereafter, but rather studied to inquire what was the will of God, ‘ pleasing and perfect,’ for the beginning and accomplishing every good work.”—Im. of Ch.

“ We may, and even should, firmly believe,” says Bossuet, “ that we are in the number of those for whom Jesus Christ has performed all his mysteries. Baptism and the other sacraments, received afterwards in proper dispositions, are a sure pledge of his good will in our regard, and we are not permitted to doubt it ; as for predestination, it is, and ever shall be, during this life, an impenetrable secret for us. An habitual and anxious doubt respecting our eternity would render life an insupportable yoke, were we not invited to commit our salvation in the hands of God, and rely more upon him than upon ourselves. We are assured that our supplications shall be heard, provided we expect every thing from his goodness. The most powerful and encouraging inducement to prayer is the ineffable mercy of God who always grants us what we want, and beyond our merits. Although we be strictly bound to fulfil all the conditions requisite to render our prayers acceptable before him, and be persuaded that they are always defective, yet we must still entertain a confident hope that he will not judge us with rigour, but let himself be appeased by an unequivocal sorrow for our sins. If Jesus Christ,” continues the same venerable and learned Bishop, “ had shed his most precious blood only for the

elect, how could it be believed and said that he is dead for every one of us ? ‘ If any man sin we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the just ! and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.’—1 John ii. 1, 3. All those who have been baptized, and receive the other sacraments with good dispositions (this is an indispensable condition), are thereby assured, as far as it is possible to be, in this state of probation, that Jesus Christ is dead for them, and the superabundant merits of his death have been, or are, applied to them. But the less equivocal sign which we can have that this divine Saviour is dead for us in particular, is, to do all that is pleasing to him, to expect every thing from the influence of his grace, and abandon ourselves, without restriction or reserve, to his infinite goodness. All doubts and inquiries about predestination ought always to terminate in that total abandonment, and in a thorough conviction that our salvation is safer in his hands than in our own. We must lose ourselves in the sublime height, and impenetrable depth of his wisdom and all his infinite perfections. But, let it be carefully remembered, that, that blind and confident abandonment of ourselves, so forcibly recommended by all spiritual writers, does not authorize the least neglect of the means and precautions enjoined by religion, to avoid sin and persevere in the practice of virtue. By acting in this Christian and wise manner, there is no doubt that God, faithful to his promises, will never forsake us. This is all that which we can know during this life, of the mystery of predestination. All other thoughts, reflections, conjectures, and fears are quite groundless and attended with danger. Hence, we may rely with peace, not upon our own exertions, but upon the more than paternal goodness of the Almighty for the work of his hands. To possess a

complete assurance of the purity of our conscience, cannot be expected; nor should we seek it with reflection. When God is pleased to favour a pious and humble soul with an inward peace and tranquillity, and thus give her a pledge of his love towards her; let her receive this most precious gift with the most lively gratitude, and redouble her endeavours to correspond, with the utmost fidelity, with his graces, walking with simplicity under the shadow of his wings. As for those who remain in a total darkness respecting their inward dispositions, it is a sign that God will have them entirely disengaged from all human comforts, dead to themselves, and have no other foundation to rest upon and trust but his infinite power and mercy. I therefore repeat it to you, and I wish it could be imprinted in your mind in indelible characters, that there is no joy, no rest, no true adoration, but in that entire abandonment to the supreme and unalterable goodness of God. "One is good, God," says Jesus Christ; it is, consequently, on him alone upon whom we can rely for time and eternity.

"You ask me," says St. Francis of Sales, "if a soul that is deeply penetrated with a sense of her miseries, can address herself to God with confidence. I answer, yes. Nay, I add that her confidence would be ill-grounded, if she did not know all her miseries; for it is this knowledge and confession of our miseries, which introduces us to God. Mercy cannot be exercised but towards the miserable. It is, without doubt, very useful and necessary to be filled with confusion, at the sight and feeling of our miseries. But we must not stop there, and give way to despondency; but arise with courage and a holy confidence in him, and not in ourselves. For whilst we are daily exposed to yield to our natural propensities, to change and inconstancy, yet God is immutable. He is as good and merciful when we are

weak and imperfect, as when we are perfect and strong. It is good and proper to distrust ourselves ; but of what profit would that diffidence be, if not to prompt and encourage us to trust in God, and expect every thing from his mercy ? Although you do not feel that confidence, yet do not fail to make acts of that virtue. Say to him, " O Lord, though I am destitute of confidence in thee, yet I still know that thou art my God, and myself am entirely thine. I have no other hope but in thy goodness, therefore I abandon entirely myself to thee. It may happen that such acts are said without any feelings of relish and satisfaction ; but we ought not to be alarmed at the privation of them, since our Lord likes them better so. Do not say that you pronounce those acts only with the tongue and lips ; for certainly, if the heart did not inspire you with the will to make them, you would remain silent. I am accustomed to say, that our misery is the throne of God's mercy, therefore the greater our misery is, the greater confidence should we have." When you are low-spirited and desponding, do not be deterred by your fears. Why would you on that account give up all your pious exercises, as if it were to no purpose ? Supposing your weaknesses and infidelities greater than in reality they are, do they annihilate the power and mercy of God ? Cast yourself blindfolded at the feet of our Redeemer, beseech him to let one single drop of his most precious blood fall upon your soul, and all its defilements will be washed away. Perhaps I shall be blamed by some of my readers for having too much insisted respecting temptations of excessive fear with regard to our lot or destiny in the life to come. But I beg leave to observe to them, that the pious souls who are visited by them, are entitled to the utmost sympathy and compassion, and in great want of instruction and comfort. I consi-

dered, therefore, as a duty incumbent upon me, to offer to those who might be tried that way, the means which my readings and long experience had taught me the most conducive to help them to preserve, or recover the peace of their conscience during such hard trials.

Our thoughts are not always subject to the command of our will, nor the offspring of choice. Often they are inevitably impressed upon the mind by surrounding objects. Often they start up of themselves, without any principle of introduction which we are able to trace. "As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor where it goeth," equally rapid in its transitions, and inscrutable in its progress, is the course of thought. Moving along a train of connexions which are too delicate for observation, it defeats all endeavours, either to explore or to stop its paths. Hence vain and fantastical ideas or conceptions break in upon the most settled imagination, and even disturb the pious exercises of devout minds. Hence the most pure souls are sometimes molested by the most hideous phantoms, and shocking representations. Not being always capable of distinguishing what they *suffer* only, from what they knowingly entertain, they tremble at what they may have thought or felt, as if they had been some way or other accessory to it; and, by an unavoidable consequence, reproach themselves with sins to which they are the most averse, and which in fact they have not committed. Instances of this sort must be placed to the account of human frailty, or the suggestions of "our adversary the devil, who as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour."—1 Peter v. 8. They are temptations to be guarded against, not crimes to be condemned. Our gracious Lord who knows our frame, "and that the imagination and thought of man are prone to evil from his youth" (Gen. viii. 21), will not be



severe in marking such involuntary error and wandering of the mind.

Be not therefore alarmed, were you to pass through such fiery trials. As long as you wish to be delivered from every improper thought or feeling, and inwardly detest and resist them, whatever they may be, your heart remains undefiled. The anxieties and troubles which the pious soul feels during the conflict, her dread of having yielded to the suggestions, are an evident proof that her will had no part with her thoughts or impressions, and that she has been like the children of the Hebrews, preserved unhurt in the burning furnace. It is related in the life of Saint Catherine of Sienna, that she was assaulted by the most violent temptations against the holy virtue of purity; and this went on for a long time, till one day our Saviour appearing to her, she said to him, "where were you, my sweet Lord, when my heart was so full of darkness and uncleanness?" To which he answered, "I was within thy heart, my daughter." "And how," replied she, "could you dwell in my heart, where there was such impurity? Can you dwell then in such unclean places?" And our Lord said to her, "did these filthy thoughts give thee pleasure or sadness, bitterness or delight?" "Most extreme bitterness and sadness," said she. And our Saviour replied, "who was it then that put this great bitterness and sadness in thy heart, but I who remained there hidden within the midst of thy soul? Believe, daughter, had I not been there present, these thoughts which surrounded thy will, and could not prevail, had doubtless overcome it, and entered in and had been received with pleasure by thy free will, and so had brought death to thy soul. But because I was within, I put this displeasure and this resistance in thy heart; by which it rejected the temptation, as much as it could; and not

being able to do it as much as it would, it conceived a greater displeasure, and a greater hatred against it, and against itself, and thus these troubles were a great merit, and a great advantage to thee, and a great increase of thy virtue and strength.”—St. Fr. of Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*.

In the hard struggles between nature and grace, the old man and the new one; viz., between the imagination and the senses, and the will and the understanding; a strict, though always calm vigilance, profound humility, sincere distrust of one's self, boundless confidence in the infinite goodness of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, and the frequentation of the sacraments, will be your protection and safeguard. With such helps you will always be able to resist and conquer. “Be comforted,” said a pious and learned bishop, addressing himself to persons in troubles of mind, “be comforted; God does not forbid you to be attacked and molested; but to let yourselves be conquered. It does not depend upon you to be free from temptations; but with the assistance of his grace, which he will never fail to grant you, if you earnestly ask for it, it depends upon you to overcome them. Cease therefore to be dejected and grieve at these inward trials; it is under them and by them that piety shines forth with greater splendour. To be unacquainted with such trials, according to the remark of St. Cyprian, is a particular happiness; to come off victorious of them is the triumph of virtue. But those allowances and reflections being made, there still remains much scope for the proper government of thought; and a multitude of cases occur, in which we are no less accountable for what we think than for what we do. 1. When the introduction of any train of thoughts depends upon ourselves, and is our voluntary act, by turning our attention towards such objects,

awakening such passions, or engaging in such employments as we know must give a peculiar determination to our thoughts. 2. When thoughts, by whatever accident they may have been originally suggested, are indulged with deliberation and complacency! Though the mind may have been passive in their reception, and therefore free from blame, yet if it be active in their continuance, the guilt becomes its own. They may have intruded at first like unbidden guests; but if, when entered they are made welcome and kindly entertained, the case is the same as if they had been invited from the beginning.

As soon as you perceive that some temptation is coming upon you, run up to God, says St. Francis of Sales, crying out to him for assistance and mercy. But do not look the temptation in the face, but look only on our Lord: for if you look at the temptation, principally when it is strong, it might shake your courage. Divert your mind from it, by applying to some good, and commendable occupations; for they coming into your heart, and taking possession of it, will chase away the evil temptation and suggestions.

Moreover, the great remedy against all temptations, great or small, is to lay open our heart to the guide of our soul, communicate to him with simplicity and candour the nature, cause, and feelings which are the result of the temptation, and to abide by his decision, and follow his advice. If after all this the temptation should obstinately continue to harass and torment our imagination, we have nothing else to do, but on our part to continue as resolute never to consent to it. "Let not, therefore, strange fancies trouble thee, of what kind soever they be that are suggested to thee; keep thy resolution firm, and thy intention upright toward God. Neither is it an illusion, that sometimes thou art wrapt into an ecstasy, and presently returnest to the accustomed weak-

nesses of thy heart, for these thou rather *sufferest* against thy will, than *procurest*; and as long as thou art displeased with them and resist them, it is a merit and not loss.”—Im. of Christ. Dispute not with the enemy, never answer him one single word, unless it be the same by which our Saviour confounded and drove him away. “Begone, Satan, for it is written, the Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve.” Fight like a good soldier; and if sometimes you fall through frailty, rise up again with greater strength than before, confiding in my more abundant grace. But take great care thou yield not to any vain complacency and pride. Through this, many are led into error and sometimes fall into incurable blindness. Let this fall of the proud, who foolishly rely upon their strength, serve thee for a warning, and keep thee always humble.”—Im. of Ch.

The practical conclusion to be drawn from the preceding reflections and rules is, 1. To watch and pray not to be led into temptation. 2. Not to expose yourself with deliberation or rashness to any occasion of temptation. 3. As for those temptations which are not of your own choice, which you cannot avoid, and which God permits through the inscrutable designs of his unerring wisdom, and always merciful providence, not to be alarmed at them, and discouraged, and especially not to give up your usual exercises of piety and good works; but to bear those trials with patience and fortitude, fully convinced that God, who knows much better than we can ever do, what is for our good, will make them most effectually contribute to your improvement in virtue, and eternal salvation.

As you are going to travel through different Catholic countries, I beg leave to lay before you some few considerations which, I think, may be of service to you, to guard you against a temptation which may be dangerous

to a new convert. I mean the conduct of many Catholics who, though they have not abjured their faith, yet live a life in direct opposition to the precepts of the religion which they openly profess. It is unfortunately but too true, that although as Catholics, we hold the pure doctrine of Christ, yet we are still subject to many defects and failings, and of course that we are still far from being perfect ; but we most sincerely regret not to be so. You will hear now and then of great scandals among us ; but you must know at the same time, that we bewail and reprobate them, and most earnestly beseech the Father of mercies to put an end to them. Scandals, and great scandals there were in the purest antiquity, even in the time of the apostles. Is it therefore to be wondered at, that there should be many in our degenerate and corrupt age ? Reflect on this prediction of our Saviour, “ It is impossible that scandals should not come ” (Luke xvii. 1), and your surprise will cease. We confess it to our great shame and with bitter tears. There are Catholics, who could with justice be called enemies of the cross of Christ, as St. Paul said of some Christians of his days. “ Many walk, of whom I have told you often (and now tell you weeping) that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction.”—Philip. iii. 18. Such Christians are still a part of the body of the Catholic Church, but only as gangrened members ; if she do not cast them off, as long as they do not commit the heinous crime of rejecting openly her doctrine. Although she most severely condemns their prevarications, and threatens them with eternal punishments, if she still bears with them ; if she still continues to pour forth the most ardent prayer and supplications for their conversion before the throne of the sovereign Judge ; if she still hopes even against hope, it is because she has, even towards her rebellious and obstinate children, a most tender and

truly maternal heart, and knows that God does not wish for the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live; it is because, that, as long as there is a spark of life in our fellow-creatures, how wicked soever they may be, we should not entirely despair of their salvation, and that Jesus Christ may vouchsafe "to endure with much patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction, that he might show the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he hath prepared unto glory."—Rom. ix. 22, 23.

Therefore, wherever you go, let not the disorders or scandals which you may hear of, or witness, among Catholics, shake your faith, as if they were, if not approved, at least connived at by our Church. That there should be always scandals among the faithful, has been foretold by our Saviour himself, when he said, that "the cockle shall remain with the wheat till the end of the harvest;" and in another place, that "the kingdom of God is like unto a net cast into the sea, and gathering together all kinds of fishes, which, when it was filled, they drew out, and, setting by the shore, they chose out the good into vessels, but the bad they cast forth. So it shall be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out and shall separate the wicked from among the just."—Matt. xiii. 47—49. It is evident, that under this plain and ingenious allegory, if we join it to the words which our Saviour addressed to St. Peter and St. Andrew, "I will make you fishers of men," his intention was to represent the state of the Church upon earth, during this life; the mixture of the good and the wicked who will remain confounded together, and that final discernment and irrevocable separation which are to take place at the end of the world, when the Son of man, surrounded by legions of angels, "will come in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty," to judge the

living and the dead, and render to every one according to his works.

But if I have not concealed from you, that, in our extremely numerous church there are Catholics whom we may call nominal Catholics, I should be egregiously deficient in truth as well as in justice, if I did not assure you at the same time, that you will find in it many souls not only exempt from shocking vices and grievous sins, but even, for the most part, of faults and imperfections ; who, living in the midst of the intricate affairs and bustle of the world, and the concerns and solitudes inevitable in the care of a large family, or the management of public employments, lead a truly spiritual life ; “ whose conversation is in heaven ” (Philip. iii. 20), and who “ use this world as if they used it not.”—1 Cor. vii. 31. From the fundamental principle of the pretended Reformation, that the Holy Scripture is the sole rule of faith, and each individual has an incontrovertible right to interpret it according to his best judgment, Catholic divines had foreseen, that in process of time, there would be as many creeds as particular churches or congregations. That happened even during the lives of Luther and Calvin, and is particularly conspicuous in our days. The Protestants of Germany bear no resemblance with the Protestants of Geneva and Switzerland ; nor these with the Protestants of Poland, Sweden, and Denmark. Even under the same government, the Episcopalians in England hold doctrines quite different from those of the Presbyterians in Scotland, and from the numberless churches of Quakers, Anabaptists, Unitarians, and various descriptions of Methodists, &c. &c., divided among themselves into a thousand different sects, the one rejecting what the others adopt, except in their prejudices and misrepresentations of Catholicism, in which

all agree ; among Protestants of all denominations you will not find, *now*, one single sect that have the same way of thinking with regard to the articles of faith which their founders judged essential and indispensable to believe in order to be saved. Even among their actual followers or proselytes, it is not rare to see some to differ in opinion from their ministers, and it is a fact that *now* many clergymen of the Established Church do not believe several of the Thirty-nine Articles. If, in our days, we have seen in some countries of Germany, Lutherans and Calvinists reunited in one and the same church, although both continued to hold and maintain their distinctive and opposite points of doctrine ; what other conclusion can we draw from that reunion, but that they attach no longer any importance to that doctrine and those articles of faith, on account of which they had anathematized each other for so many years, and that they have fallen into indifferentism, which is nothing else but mere *Deism* under the specious names of liberality, toleration, charity, and the fruit of the progress of intellect, and a more enlightened Christianity.

It is only in the Catholic Church that you will find uniformity of doctrine and morals. Whatever part of the globe you may choose for the place of your residence, if Catholicism have penetrated there, with regard to religion, you will never be a stranger. Under the burning sun of Africa and the Indies, as in the midst of the ice and snow of the frozen pole, the same mysteries are taught and believed, the same symbol is recited, the same sacrifice is offered, the same sacraments administered, the practice of the same virtues is enjoined, the same exterior worship observed, as in France, where you have received your first instructions. Nay, I shall affirm, without being afraid of being contradicted by



any solid arguments or well-grounded evidences, that it is only in the Catholic Church, that the pure doctrine of Jesus Christ has been constantly, and is now taught in all its integrity, and his moral precepts observed in their greater perfection, and even to heroism. It is only among the faithful brought up in her bosom, formed and instructed by her lessons, that in all ages, and under every climate one has always seen, and one still sees privileged souls that, by an entire disengagement, and renunciation of all earthly advantages and pleasures, and the sanctity of their life, raising themselves to the sublimity of the evangelical counsels, present to us in this land of misery and wickedness, the ravishing image of that spotless chastity, which will make us one day similar to the angels, when divested from this mortal body, which keeps us subjected to the tyranny of the senses, we shall be clothed with a spiritual body, and united to the eternal and inexhaustible Source of all good and perfections.

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## XXIX.

## CROSSES AND AFFLICTIONS.

“Dispose and order all things as thou wilt, and as it seems best to thee, and thou wilt still find something to suffer, either willingly or unwillingly, and so thou shalt find the cross. The better thou disposest thyself for suffering, the more wisely dost thou act, and more dost thou merit, and thou wilt bear it more easily, thy mind being well prepared for it, and accustomed to it. Be therefore ready to fight; if thou desirest to gain the victory, fight manfully, and endure patiently. Without

labour there is no coming to rest, nor without fighting can the victory be obtained.”—Im. of Christ.

Crosses are to be met with in all the conditions of life. They originate either from the infirmities of our body, the passions of our soul, or from our own imperfections or from those of the people with whom we are obliged to be associated. Their excessive or insupportable weight comes from ourselves, and not from God. Let us be resigned, and then they will become lighter. He will help us to bear them with courage by the consolations which he will infuse into our souls. By moderating the violence of our passions, and excessive sensibility, which are the chief cause of almost all sufferings, he will diminish the number of many of our crosses, and sweeten the bitterness of the others. Were the love of God predominant in our hearts, by thus disengaging our affections from the objects which we are either afraid to lose or desirous to obtain, there would be an end of all disquietude and pains, and we should enjoy the greatest peace. The harder are the crosses, the more attentive and careful ought we to be not to increase them by our own fault. But this we unfortunately too frequently do, by striving to be delivered from them against the will of God, or by the violent and vain efforts which we make to stifle entirely our natural sensibility. We ought to be immoveable under the cross, and willing to bear it as long as God pleases, without impatience to shake it off, and humbly resigned to the humiliation of bearing it so ill. Crosses would be no longer crosses, if our self-love could be gratified by the consciousness of bearing them with courage. We should then suffer not as Christians, but as proud stoics ; in order to render our crosses subservient to our salvation, we should feel our extreme weakness, find no resource in ourselves, and in that despair of self-love,

be compelled to say as Jesus Christ upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me."—Matt. xxvii. 46. How precious then would be the submission of our will in the sight of Him who forms it in our soul! Although he thinks proper to give us a sensible feeling of that desirable disposition, penetrate your mind with the truth of these words of St. Austin: "Let nothing of myself be left in me, nor on which I can still look with complacency. *Nihil in me relinquatur mihi, nec quo respiciam ad meipsum.*" Do not listen to your imagination, nor the reflections of human wisdom. Annihilate all, as far as possible, remaining resigned and calm in the hands of the Beloved.

Moreover, we should consider crosses as means of doing penance for our sins, and as an exercise of that spiritual death to ourselves which leads to perfection. Were we exempt from crosses we should be exposed to be intoxicated with self-love, and live a slothful and effeminate life? "Dost thou think to escape that which no mortal could ever avoid? What saint was there ever in the world without his cross or affliction? Our Lord Jesus Christ himself was not one hour of his life without suffering. 'It behoved,' said he, (Luke xxiv.) 'that Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead, and so enter into his glory;' and how dost thou pretend to seek another way, than this royal way, which is the way of the holy cross? If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy desired end; to wit, to that place where there will be an end to suffering, though here there will be none. If thou carry it unwillingly, thou makest it a burden to thee, and loadest thyself the more and nevertheless thou must bear it. If thou fling away one cross, without doubt thou wilt find another and perhaps a heavier. We

should therefore look upon crosses as necessary and very wholesome remedies.”—Im. of Christ.

Nature inspires only with a proud courage, always attended with contempt of others and irritation. Grace, on the contrary, teaches and enables the pious Christian to bear his sufferings, with a sweet, humble, and peaceable fortitude. It is by crosses, that we become worthy of God, and conformable to his divine Son: they are a portion of our daily bread. God will determine and fix their measure and the time of their duration according to our wants, with which he is fully acquainted, and which ourselves we so little know. Let him do as he pleases; and for us, let us be the children of Providence, without troubling our minds with thoughts about futurity. “They that seek the Lord, shall not be deprived of any good.”—Ps. xxxiii. Providence would do wonders in our behalf, but we prevent it by our anxiety to anticipate them. By our industrious and solicitous care and vain foresight, we trust on a providence of our own making, which is as uncertain and unstable, as that of God is wise, firm, and immutable. Pious people are liable to suffer the same calamities to which people living in the world are exposed: fatigue, disappointments, opposition of characters, corporal infirmities, difficulties with themselves as well as with others, in short all sorts of temptations. But if many of their crosses resemble exteriorly those of the world, the motives and means of supporting them are quite different. Pious people, through the light of the Holy Ghost infused into their souls, know the value and virtue of the cross. They know that it renews and purifies them. They behold every thing in God, and never so clearly and profitably, as in sufferings and humiliations. The cross is the strength of God himself; the

more effectually it destroys the old man in us, the more powerfully it promotes the reign of Jesus Christ in our hearts.

To bear crosses we ought to be prepared ; but to be ourselves the authors of them, we must carefully beware. The crosses which proceed from an unreasonable curiosity about future events, do not come from God, they are our own work. We tempt him by indulging our shortsighted and limited wisdom ; and it produces only bitter fruit. God permits it when we are so senseless and presumptuous as to withdraw ourselves from his paternal protection. Future events are not in our power ; those which we foresee may never occur, or if ever they come to pass, it may be in quite a different manner from what we imagine. Let us therefore never attempt to dive into the secrets of Divine Providence, in order to discover what God keeps hidden in his inscrutable decrees. Let us adore them without seeing, and remain silent and in peace. The crosses of the present day are always attended with a peculiar grace, adapted to our actual wants ; and consequently the hand of God, which we perceive in them, is a principle of strength and comfort. But the crosses which in opposition to his will we foresee, are destitute of that grace, which otherwise would help us to bear them. Nay, our infidelity in that regard, is the cause which deprives us from that spiritual assistance. Hence all is bitter and insupportable in them ; nothing is seen but that which is sad and melancholy, and without resource. Thus the soul that through curiosity yielded to the temptation of eating the forbidden fruit, finds in it revolt and death, instead of the consolation which she expected to enjoy. This is the baneful result of distrusting in God, and presuming to penetrate his secret.

“Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,” says

Jesus Christ. The evil of the day becomes good, when we leave it to God. When we meet with some unexpected occurrence, shall we be so bold as to say to him, Why hast thou done this or that? He is the Lord; that ought to be sufficient. He is the Lord, let him do all that is good in his sight. Let him elevate or abase, strike or comfort, wound or heal, give death or preserve life, he is always the Lord, and we the work of his hands, and therefore always at his disposal. Whatever may happen, what does it signify provided he be glorified, and his adorable and always merciful will be accomplished in us? Let us lay aside all selfish concern and self-love, and the will of God unfolding itself at each moment of the day, will bring with it light, support and consolation. The contradictions of men, their fickleness, inconstancy, ingratitude, even their most crying injustice will appear to us the effects of the wisdom, justice, and unceasing goodness of the Almighty. Under the weaknesses and disorders of blind and corrupt men, we shall always see a God infinitely good and bountiful. Thus that deceitful figure of the world which passes away like a vain, flimsy, stage decoration, will become for us a very instructive lesson. Men, how elevated soever they may be by their rank, fortune, or genius, are nothing by themselves. But God knows how to make use of them for the wisest and most admirable purposes. He makes the extravagances, the senseless pride, vanity, dissimulation; in fine, the wild passions of men, subservient to the accomplishment of his eternal counsels over his elect. He employs the corruption of the one, to purify the others. He turns to our advantage our sensibility; he moves the heavens and the earth, unknown to us, to render us worthy of him and secure our sanctification. Let us therefore rejoice, instead of giving way to immoderate grief, when our

heavenly Father thinks proper to try us by various interior or exterior crosses. Let us rejoice, because by such sufferings our faith, more precious than gold, is purified. Let us rejoice thus to be enabled by our own experience to learn the nothingness and deceitfulness of all that is not God. It is by that crucifying experience that we are divested from ourselves, and entirely disabused of all the vanities, and false and fleeting delights of this perishable world.

Empires and generations successively disappear and vanish away from the face of the earth; but God subsists for ever and ever. How consoling is this truth to an afflicted soul! "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth."—Job xix. 25. Yes, O my God, I am assured always to find thee. If men forsake me, thou shalt always be my refuge and asylum. What can I fear if thou art with me? Another principle of consolation, and the most encouraging, because it extends to all circumstances and conditions, is, that the Lord is the father of orphans, the protector of widows, the support of the helpless, the comfort of the afflicted, "and hears the desire of the poor, and his ear hears the preparation of their heart."—Ps. x. 17. We are sometimes under an absolute impossibility of praying to God in the assembly of the faithful; but this impossibility does not in the least hinder our intercourse with him. There is no place, no distance, no state of life which can prevent us from turning our hearts to him, and forming the desire to please him. He hears that desire, and this is sufficient to move him to compassion, and incline him to bestow his favours upon us. That habitual preparation is the food of the soul, a principle of conformity to his adorable will, which most effectually contributes, to the comfort, joy, and peace of the just under the most severe calamities.

Perhaps it will be said, how can the just enjoy comfort and peace under the most galling crosses and greatest afflictions? Does their justice divest them from human nature, and its feelings? No, certainly, if they had felt nothing, suffered nothing, what could their merit be? But animated with a strong faith, and unshaken hope in the rewards which awaited them in a future life, their distresses and sufferings disappeared, not indeed, with regard to *natural feelings*, for sufferings and calamities are always felt and attended with pain, but with regard to bitterness, troubles, impatience, and murmurings, which in too many people are the usual effects of sufferings and tribulations. Thus relying upon the unerring promises of God, and thoroughly convinced that his power is equal to his infinite goodness, the just are supported and consoled by the expectation of the rewards reserved to their patience and resignation. Nay, it sometimes happens that their hopes raise them so much above the weakness of nature, that they cherish their sufferings, and are filled with comfort and exceedingly abound with joy in all their trials and tribulations. Such was St. Paul, and such were so many saints. "I am filled with comfort," said the apostle, "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation."—2 Cor. vii. 4.

If piety had no other privilege, but that of diminishing the number of our sufferings, by diminishing the number of our passions and attachments; of rendering us less sensible to our losses, by disengaging us by degrees from the inordinate love of objects, which we are daily exposed to lose at a minute's warning, and preparing our hearts to bear afflictions by constantly entertaining in us an unreserved submission in the designs of God. If, I say, piety were to procure us no other advantage, no other consolation, could we consistently with justice and reason complain of the restraint and privations which the practice of its duties now and then



imposes upon us ? What should we more earnestly wish for in this miserable life, every day of which is almost always marked out by some disappointment or loss ? Our relatives, protectors, and friends fall at each moment by our side, our fortune depends upon many contingences which we cannot foresee nor prevent ; our health, nay our life, is exposed to a thousand accidents which the most consummate wisdom and prudence cannot avert. Is there any thing, therefore, more desirable than to be animated with sentiments which can procure us steadiness, calm, and tranquillity, in the midst of the agitation and external vicissitudes of this world, and a comfortable and safe harbour against the storms and hurricanes which are constantly spreading far and wide among its inhabitants desolation and ruin ? When the heart bleeds from some recent loss or misfortune ; there is no remedy so efficacious to assuage the pain, and heal the wound, as that which religion affords. Piety enlightens the darkest hour, softens the hardest heart, supports under the most acute pains. The hope of a blessed immortality revives the drooping spirits, and inspires the afflicted or suffering soul with a supernatural courage which renders her immoveable, and peaceably resigned under the most unexpected woes.

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### XXX.

#### SICKNESSES.

Make use of the sickness with which it has pleased God to visit you, to learn to depend upon him alone, and renounce your will. Obey without scrupulosity the prescriptions of the physician. To act otherwise would

be contrary to the order of Providence. "Honour the physician," says the Scripture, "for the need thou hast of him, for all the healing is from God."—Eccl. xxxviii. 1, 2. When your infirmities keep you at home, do not give way to any sadness, because you cannot go to church, nor persevere with obstinacy in fasting or abstinence when the physician has ordered otherwise. When your mind is incapable of close application, do not exert yourself with violent efforts to make your mental prayer, that rigorous exactness and application would hurt your head, and be an obstacle to your recovery. Be contented to recal yourself to the presence of God, and raise your heart to him by short and fervent aspirations. This habitual tendency of your affections to him, and resignation to his will, will not exhaust your strength, but will draw upon you spiritual graces which will fortify and console you. Bear with generosity all the privations which are the effects of your malady and great weakness. Support with sweetness and patience, the mistakes, negligence, and imperfections of your attendants. We should consider, when sick, our docility to the physician's prescriptions, as a compliance with God's will, who will bless that docility.

It is a harder cross than is generally imagined, to be under the necessity of taking disgusting medicaments, submitting to painful operations, and being for a long time under a particular diet, in spite of the continual cravings of nature. Nothing is so common in such cases, as to lose patience, and be tempted to indulge in things which would be detrimental to our health. Instead of that, an enlightened piety teaches us to make a profitable use of all the means which we are advised to take in order to be cured. And thus the remedies which we are compelled to employ, in order to restore to our body its former health and vigour, are at the same time very

serviceable to mortify our passions, and keep our senses under the control of reason and religion. Oh! how happy are we if God vouchsafe to accept the inconveniences and sufferings attending sickness, as a part of our penance! We should always consider maladies as hidden favours, and as a sign that God intends to draw us nearer to him by showing us the frailty of our mortal life.

Such are the precious treasures, and great benefits which we can derive from sickness when borne with in a spirit of religion. Take therefore all the repose which you stand in need of to recruit your debilitated strength. But let it be in the arms and on the bosom of Jesus, the eternal lover of your soul. He who is unwilling or unresigned to suffer, renders his transient sufferings similar in some degree to those of the reprobate who has no hope of relief; whilst he that is resigned, changes his into invaluable and eternal blessings. Why do we say every day, "Our Father who art in heaven," if we do not abandon ourselves with confidence to God in sickness as well as in health, like docile, dutiful, and affectionate children? He who has numbered the very hairs of our head, and does not let a single one fall without his permission, and for some useful purpose unknown to our limited understanding, beholds with a tender compassion our maladies, and has fixed the term of their duration. It will come in due time. He will never fail to grant us what he knows to be necessary for our help, and to promote our sanctification. Therefore take up your cross with fortitude and cheerfulness. By that unexpected sickness you will learn to suffer. This science is most desirable. He who has acquired it, knows all that is requisite to secure his eternal happiness. But those who had never been tried by sufferings or maladies,

know neither the infinite goodness of God, nor their extreme weakness.

When the fever is abated, and you begin to enjoy some interruption of pain, pour fourth your whole heart before God, saying at intervals, and by inward aspirations, "I wish, O my most merciful Redeemer, to suffer with peace and resignation, in conformity to thy will. Revive, increase my faith, and animate me with the patience of thy saints. I look upon thee who art the author and finisher of faith, and who having joy set before thee, hast endured the cross, despising the shame." Have pity upon me. If some impatience escape me, may I humble myself immediately and repair it by a hearty contrition. I unite myself to thee, who in thy bitter agony hast offered to thy heavenly Father thy divine prayers and those of thy suffering members. I accept of this disease as coming from thy beneficent hand. I firmly believe that thou hast sent it to me to make me bear some faint resemblance with thee, and thus help me to work out my sanctification with greater safety. But, O Lord, thou hast promised us never to send us trials which we could not support, and thou art always faithful to thy promises. I therefore most humbly and earnestly beseech thee, to grant me either the strength or fortitude which I want, or to spare my weakness. O Jesus, my Saviour! O Jesus, name of grace and mercy. I repeat from the bottom of my heart the prayer which thou addressed in thy agony to thy heavenly Father. 'If it be possible remove this chalice from me, but if I must drink it, let thy will be done, and not mine.'"

## XXXI.

## ON THE DEATH OF RELATIVES AND FRIENDS.

When we lose our friends or relatives, our grief on account of their death should be moderated by the consolations which religion affords. "Be not sorrowful as the gentiles that have no hope."—1 Thess. iv. 12. By these words we clearly see, that the apostle does not blame nor forbid to be sorrowful, but only to be so as the gentiles are. Death for them is an irrevocable and eternal separation, from those whom they love. For Christians, it is only an absence of short duration. We part from each other as for a journey, with a confident hope of soon meeting again. In a few days we shall be reunited to those whom we have lost, for every day we advance with rapid strides towards the place which they inhabit. Let us wait for a little while, and there would be no longer cause for grief and fears. We are dying; those whose death we regret, are living a most happy life, never exposed again to die. We believe it, but in a very imperfect manner, for were our belief such as it ought to be, we should be respecting the death of our most intimate friends, as Jesus Christ would have his disciples to be with regard to himself, when he announced to them that he was soon to leave them to ascend up to heaven: "If you loved me you would indeed be glad, because I go to the Father," said he.—John xiv. 28. But we bewail ourselves when we shed tears on the death of those whom we love. In the most rigorous strokes we should always see the paternal hand of God, and the secret views of his tenderness and mercy over us. Sometimes he hastens to bring out the well-disposed Christian from the midst of the delusive en-

joyments of the world, lest, by remaining a longer time in it, "its bewitching vanity should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul."—Wisd. iv. 11—14. How many admirable miracles of goodness and mercy shall we discover in the next life, which are in this covered with an impenetrable veil. Then we shall sing canticles of gratitude and joy for those very events which now occasion the most bitter tears. In the darkness which encompasses us on all sides we cannot perceive what is good or evil. If God acquiesced to all our petitions we should often be ruined, even in this life, and lost for ever in the next. But he saves us by breaking asunder the connexions which he knows to be prejudicial to our final happiness. When he separates two persons, united together by the sacred bands of holy friendship, he bestows upon both the most precious favour; he puts the one in the possession of eternal bliss, and by his death he teaches the other how to disengage his heart from the inordinate love of creatures; thus, by the loss of the object of our affections we learn how little we ought to rely upon all that is so rapidly passing away, and are timely admonished to be prepared for our last end. Let us not, however, think that the disengagement of heart produced by the influence of divine grace, weakens the ties of holy friendships. By no means; it strengthens and purifies them, by teaching us to love our friends as we are ourselves loved by him, and to love them in him and for him.

Moreover, what ought we to wish for our best friends in this vain, transitory, and contagious world? If the love of God were the predominant sentiment of our hearts, could we complain, with justice, of the effects of his love in our regard? If faith were the rule of our judgments, could we shed bitter tears because he brings out, from temptations and dangers of sin, those who are

dear to us? Does he do us the least injury by shortening the days of our struggles, combat, seduction, and misery? What do we want? A prolongation of dangers, more violent temptations, which the elect themselves, if possible, could scarcely resist! Blind and infatuated, we long after earthly and flimsy enjoyments, which may, for a short time, gratify self-love, and the baneful consequence of which is to make us forget, in the land of exile, the high destiny and unspeakable delights reserved for us in our heavenly country. God withdraws the poisonous cup from our lips, and we shed tears as a little child, from whose hands an affectionate mother wrests a knife, which he was heedlessly going to plunge into his breast. In those losses which appear irreparable, and a just cause of inconsolable grief, let us put in practice the advice which St. Austin gave to his flock. In the death of their friends, Christians may shed tears, but let them soon be dried up by the consolations of faith. “*Fundant Christiani consolabiles lacrymas, quas citò reprimat fidei gaudium.*”—St. Aust. Serm.

I acknowledge with you that our life is very uncertain and precarious. Although you enjoy good health, and are still young, it is true that you cannot answer for to-morrow, and may be called out of this world at a moment's warning. But this undeniable truth ought not to cast a gloom over your countenance and fill up your mind with terror. “Fix your thoughts,” says St. Francis of Sales, “on the goodness and mercy, with which our Saviour receives the faithful at the moment of their death, when they have during their life put their confidence in him, and endeavour to love and serve him with fervour ‘in the calling in which they were respectively called. He is infinitely good to them that are right in heart.’—Ps. xxxv. 11. Animate frequently your

heart with an humble and holy confidence in our sweet Redeemer, saying to him, O Lord, I am poor and miserable, but thou wilt receive my misery in the bosom of thy mercy; thy paternal hand will take me out of this wretched world, to put me in the possession of thy inheritance. I am abject and despicable, but in that awful day thou wilt display thy love for me, because I have always hoped in thee, and always sincerely wished to be thine.

“Cast all your anxieties into the abyss of his infinite goodness, he will take care of you, and stretch forth his beneficent hand to help and support you. During the course of the day, and especially when you have the happiness of receiving the blessed Eucharist, frequently raise your heart to Jesus Christ, by short and fervent acts of love and hope. Such as these: O Lord, thou art my God, my father, my friend, the spouse of my soul, the beloved of my heart. O sweet Jesus, thou art and ever shall be, my help, my refuge, and support in the day of tribulation and trouble.

“Excite in your soul, as much as it lays in your power, the love of the heavenly kingdom and its ineffable delights; and often meditate on this consoling subject. For, the more sincerely you esteem and love the felicity of our heavenly country, the less apprehensive you will be to depart from this perishable world. Adore, praise, and bless, the most holy and precious death of our crucified Saviour, hide yourself in his sacred wounds, place your whole confidence in his infinite merits, through them you will have every reason to hope for a happy death. Often recal to your mind that you are now a child of the Holy Catholic Church. Rejoice to be under her maternal care, and rest upon her affectionate bosom. For the children of this tender mother who wish and do their best to live according to her holy laws and



counsels, always die the death of the just. And as St. Theresa said ; at the hour of our death, 'it is a very great consolation to be a child of our mother,' the Holy Catholic Church." Banish therefore all excessive and unprofitable fears. Entertain on the contrary, the encouraging reflections which this great saint, and experienced director of souls has suggested to you. Continue to live a holy life, and you will have a happy death. Either you are to attain a venerable old age, or be sooner delivered from the temptations inevitable during our journey through this vale of tears. The fear of death will never deprive you of the peace of your soul, nor prevent you from fulfilling your religious and social duties, with a sweet, amiable, and cheerful fidelity. Your death may be the consequence of protracted illness, or quite sudden ; but it will never be unexpected, nor find you unprepared. You will always be ready to resign your soul into the hands of your Creator, with an humble and confident hope " to be always with the Lord. Comfort yourself, I repeat it to you, with these words." —Thess. iv. 27.

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## XXXII.

### CONCLUSION.

I am very happy to find that the rules of conduct which I have given you in these Letters have met with your approbation, and that you are resolved to follow them with fidelity. I can assure you, beforehand, that they will most efficaciously contribute to make you attain the end of all your wishes, your daily progress in Christian perfection, and even procure you that small portion of comfort and happiness which is compatible with our state of probation in this sublunary world ;

for, as it has been remarked by a philosopher of the last century, the accomplishment of the precepts of the Gospel, which, to a superficial observer, seem to have no other view and tendency but to secure to us the possession of eternal bliss in the world to come ; are, at the same time, the best, and I can say, with truth, the only means to make us comfortable and happy here below. It is what St. Paul so clearly assured by the following words : “ Godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”—1 Tim. iv. 8.

Indeed, by dedicating ourselves to the service of God, what risk do we run ? To what inconveniences shall we be exposed ? If we hold a creditable and virtuous line of conduct, we shall have nothing to alter in it ; but only to add to our ordinary actions those religious motives which can sanctify them. We shall have nearly the same duties to perform, and very likel the same difficulties to overcome, and disappointments and losses to suffer as worldlings. But what they have not, we shall enjoy : the unspeakable consolation of loving the object that is worthy to be loved without reserve. In all our undertakings and pains, we shall be assured of pleasing the perfect and only true Friend, who keeps an exact account of all that is done for his sake, and will reward us for it to the hundred fold, even in this life, by that unalterable peace which he infuses and preserves in the soul. In short, we shall always have before our eyes that blessed and eternal life, in comparison of which, this present life is but a slow death.

Whatever we may have to suffer, by faithfully adhering to the precepts of the Gospel, we shall have the peculiar advantage of being enabled, through the grace of God, to be willing to suffer what we may have to suffer, and be disengaged from the desire of enjoying the

pleasures of which we are deprived. I appeal to your own experience, are such comforts and resources to be met with by following the maxims of the world? Are its best favourites always satisfied with what they possess, and never wishing what they cannot obtain? Are they always actuated by sentiments of love? What, therefore, can we fear in the service of God? Is it to leave without bitter grief, what will leave us of its own accord, what escapes from us at every hour of the day, what cannot fill up the capacity of our heart, what is always attended with anxiety, followed by a mortal languor, often with remorse of conscience, and which in reality is a mere nothing, even when it dazzles the eye, and intoxicates the heart? What shall we fear? A more exalted and pure virtue to practise, a too merciful and amiable God to love, an irresistible and sweet attraction towards the sovereign Good, which will inspire us with disgust for the vanities of the world? What shall we fear, to become too humble, patient, pure, reasonable, condescending, charitable, and grateful towards our heavenly Father, and eternal Benefactor? Let us fear nothing more than that unjust fear, and that human wisdom, which can deliberate and hesitate between God and the world, vice and virtue, life and death.

When after mature deliberation and proper advice, some peculiar precautions are to be taken, to guard you against some unforeseen dangers, fortify your weakness, act with courage; and never be ashamed to conform your conduct with the maxims of the Gospel. In all the rest do as virtuous people of your age and condition do. "Let every man abide in the same calling in which he has been called."—1 Cor. vii. 20. Observe in all things, even the best, that moderation, prudence, discretion, sobriety, and wisdom, so forcibly recommended by St. Paul. "Be not more wise than it behoveth to be wise, but be wise unto

sobriety." This essential sobriety in the practice of virtue, the Spirit of God will teach you, and how to render it amiable by unaffected simplicity. Thus you will be exact and faithful in the whole tenour of your conduct, and exempt from perplexities and scruples; sociable, obliging, easy to be pleased, and always ready to excuse and forgive. You will besides enjoy a liberty of mind, and spiritual perspicacity, which will make you, without violent efforts, discover the smallest spots in your soul, and inspire you with a delicacy of conscience which will awaken your vigilance, prevent you from ever displeasing God with full deliberation, and transgressing the bounds of duty, propriety, and decorum.

Religion dedicates the whole man to God. She represents to us the supreme Ruler of all things under the most endearing characters, and as a most tender and indulging father. She commands us to love him with all our heart on account of his infinite perfections, and from gratitude for his daily and innumerable benefits. Yet to accommodate her precepts to our weakness, she prepares our souls for the reign of this divine sentiment, by instilling into them a filial and reverential fear of his awful majesty and unerring justice. Therefore besides her commandment to love him above all things, she teaches and strictly enjoins us to believe his word, trust in his wisdom and providence, revere his sovereign power, dread the severity of his judgments, and offer him the sacrifice of our limited reason, by adoring with humble submission the truths which he has been pleased to reveal to us, although during our mortal existence we shall never be able to sound their impenetrable depth. She does not wait till her children have inflicted upon themselves a mortal wound, to snatch the dagger from their hands, she hinders them to lay hold of it. She habituates us, from our most tender years, to subdue our passions

and mortify our senses, too apt to seduce our reason and lead us into error and vice. She hastens to extinguish the spark which, if expanded, would cause a dreadful conflagration. She stifles the motions of anger, as soon as they arise, lest, if entertained, they should degenerate into implacable hatred; she places a guard of circumspection around our eyes, from the fear, lest an indiscreet glance should defile the purity of our hearts. In short, she shuts up all the avenues of our soul to the intrusion of vice and sin. Such are her precepts which we are in duty bound to observe with fidelity, and which we can daily comply with, without doing any thing extraordinary, and by confining ourselves within the circle of our respective obligations.

I conclude by exhorting and encouraging you, as I have constantly endeavoured to impress deeply on your mind in these letters, to serve God with a noble and generous heart, and the simplicity of a child; laying aside all vain scrupulosities, and never deviating from the road pointed out to you by your spiritual guides. Yet to your indispensable duties you are at liberty to add some supererogatory practice of devotion to which you may have a particular attraction, provided it be approved by ecclesiastical authority, and do not interfere with your daily obligations, as a Christian wife, mother, or mistress. To neglect any one of them under the specious pretence of tending to a higher perfection, is the greatest illusion. Thus, "by good works you will make sure your calling and election" (2 Pet. i. 10); "for it is the will of God, that by doing well, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and as they speak against" Catholics "as evil doers," or superstitious people, "they may by the good works, which they shall behold in you, glorify God in the day of visitation."—1 Pet. ii. 12, 15.

As I have spoken to you of attraction in this letter,

I will give you a plain rule by which you will be at all times enabled to distinguish what is the effect of divine grace from the illusions of a lively and heated imagination. Any attraction which would tend to make you neglect some commandment of God and the Church, or any duty of your state of life, and prefer your way of thinking to the decision of your spiritual guide, can never be the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. It ought to be rejected as a refined and dangerous temptation of self-love, or a stratagem of the enemy to deceive and induce you to deviate from the right path, by a false appearance of perfection. But, when you feel yourself inwardly drawn to some particular practice of devotion, which does not raise you higher in your own estimation, nor incline you to indulge any singularity, but penetrates you with a deep sense of your nothingness and miseries, and contributes to make you die to yourself; if you never presume to adopt it, without having previously asked proper advice, with a firm resolution to comply readily with it, how contrary soever it may be to your wishes and inclination; such an attraction you may consider as a motion of divine grace, and the dictate of an upright conscience.

Give me leave, in finishing this Letter, to borrow the following words of the great apostle St. Paul, and say, "My dearly beloved, and most desired, my joy, and my crown: so stand fast in the Lord, I entreat you. . .

. Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, Rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men. . . Be nothing solicitous; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. . . Walk circumspectly, not as unwise but as wise; understanding what is the will of

God ; redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

. . . Be filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourself in psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Giving thanksgivings for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father, being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. We are humbly confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus. As it is meet for me to think this of you, for I have you in my heart. . . . And God is my witness how I long after you in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray that your charity may more and more abound in knowledge and in all understanding, that you may approve the better things, that you may be sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever of good fame ; if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think of these things, which you have both learned, received, and heard. . . . All these things do you, and in doing them, let not your left hand know what your right hand doth ; and you will be filled with the fruit of justice through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God, and the salvation of your soul.”—Eph. v. ; Philip. iv. Matt. vii.

THE END.

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J. W. MARRIOTT, TAUNTON.

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